

## Local Legends by Luddleston

**Category:** Hades (Video Game 2018)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Alternate Universe - College/University, Cryptid Zagreus, Drunken Kissing, First Kiss, Frottage, Getting Back Together, Getting Together, Hand Jobs, M/M, Morning Sex, Mutual Pining, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Reincarnation, Shower Sex, Slow Burn, brief angst, minor Than/Pat, will earn the explicit rating in chapter 4

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Achilles (Hades Video Game), Hypnos (Hades Video Game), Patroclus (Hades Video Game), Thanatos (Hades Video Game), Zagreus (Hades Video Game)

**Relationships:** Achilles/Patroclus (Hades Video Game), Achilles/Patroclus/Zagreus (Hades Video Game), Thanatos/Zagreus (Hades Video Game)

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**Summary:**

The Blood Man is Greenfield University's very own local cryptid, famous for his flaming feet, habit of disappearing into pools of blood, and strange questions about birds. Going theories about who he is and what he's doing here very immensely, everything from a bored engineering major setting up complicated light systems to the ghost of a past student.

Achilles wishes his roommate would stop dragging him out until 3 A.M. to find the Blood Man, but Pat has a documentary to film and a weird

obsession fueled by the strange, reportedly sexy dreams he keeps having about said cryptid.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

- For [cryogenia](#).

Thank you to the Trojan Horse Party for all the wonderful ideas that led to Cryptid Zag! Especially guhdong whose headcanons i borrowed from a LOT so i gift this to you. This ended up becoming much longer than intended and will be updated every other week with the final chapter October 1 because SPOOKY ZAG.

Hopefully. If this ends up actually landing at 6 chapters.

*"I've never seen him, no. But I've heard he shows up near the library, by the exit that comes straight out of the basement, you know?"*

*"He's called the Blood Man, because he disappears into a pool of blood when he leaves. Not that there's ever any evidence of that."*

*"He looks like a normal student—well, until you notice that his feet are on fire. He was very polite, though, and he walked me home to my dorm. He did act like a raccoon was a dog and then asked why it only had one head, that was a little weird?"*

*"There's no way this isn't a trick. Some fancy light system under his feet, and trapdoors or something. 'Blood Man'? Really? You're gonna believe that over 'some engineering major is going too hard for a joke'?"*

*"He only started appearing about two or three years ago. That's why a lot of people think it's a student. But honestly, the timing has nothing to do with it. It's the fact that his feet are on fire. You can't fake that!"*

*"Yeah, I've seen the Blood Man. He's kind of cute. In a creepy way. I'd hit it."*

*"One time, I saw him get into a fight with a goose in the fountain. It was awesome."*

"So? What do you think?" Pat leaned over the back of Achilles' chair while he watched the spliced-together video clips of various students Pat had interviewed, overlaid with captions that gave their name, major, and year.

"Honestly, it looks very much like the beginning of a cryptid documentary," Achilles said, which was not necessarily a compliment, but Pat would probably take it as an endorsement. "I still can't believe this is an actual project for an actual class."

"One would think you would be used to my supernatural ability to make projects I want to do personally fit into my class schedule somehow." Pat lifted his laptop out from under Achilles' nose, sliding back into his own chair across from Achilles' in the little corner above the bustling main walkway of the Student Union that they'd claimed as a study spot. Achilles was about to return to his biology notes when Pat continued. "I was planning to go out tonight to look for him. Coming with?"

"I have an eight A.M. tomorrow."

Pat kicked his foot, which only prompted Achilles to kick him back. "Come on. I actually saw him last time."

"So you've said." Only about a thousand times. Achilles swore, if Pat got an enormous cork-board and started doing some kind of maneuver with the pins and the strings on the wall of their dorm room, he was going to stage an intervention. Pat didn't normally have such an obsessive personality, usually regarded most things with a mild interest that fizzled once it was no longer useful. The only thing he'd really stuck to over the years was Achilles.

"Let me prove it to you."

Achilles groaned, tipping his head back. "Can't we go Friday?"

"Don't you have practice Saturday morning?"

"Yes," Achilles said, "but I don't need my brain in working order to run around a track."

"Friday it is, then." Pat was grinning in a way that would sort of terrify Achilles if he didn't know the man very, very well.

— — —

While Achilles didn't need his brain to run around a track, he did need to be awake to do so, which he was suspecting would be a difficult thing come morning, given that it was three A.M. by the time he collapsed into his bed.

"Don't groan about it like that, it'll make me self-conscious about my work," said Pat, who probably deserved to feel a little bad about dragging Achilles out for a solid six hours to hang around the basement exit to the library and look at nothing. He was sitting at his desk, all the lights in the room off except for his desk lamp, his laptop open, already scrolling through the 'Overheard at GFU' page looking for mentions of the Blood Man elsewhere on campus.

"I'm never going cryptid hunting with you again," Achilles complained.

"Don't call it 'cryptid hunting', that makes it sound like we're going after him with a shotgun."

"Then what am I to call it, exactly?"

"Documentarianism."

"Fuck off."

Achilles was about to reach for the sleep mask he'd begun to employ when Pat stayed up late with his light on, roll over, and hope his coach wouldn't mind if he slept through his alarm, but Pat leaned back in his chair, looking at Achilles with something that almost passed for apologetic. Unusual.

"You know I'm not just doing this to yank you around, right?" he said.

"Seems a distinct possibility." Achilles turned to face him. Their beds were lofted in an L-shape, with Patroclus' desk shoved underneath just next to Achilles' bed, so that they could fit a futon in the other half of the room. It meant that when Pat was at his desk, he was about three feet from Achilles' face. It also meant he was within range to fling a stack of post-its in Achilles' direction. "Hey!"

"I wouldn't do this unless it was *real*, Achilles. I've seen him."

"So you've said."

Pat shook his head. "It's not just that. Yes, I saw him, yes he fits all the descriptions, dressed like he's headed to a goth toga party, feet on fire, all of it. But, after I saw him..." He paused, glancing up at the ceiling with a kind of pensiveness Achilles was used to from him. "You're going to think it's silly."

He yawned. "Probably. Tell me anyways."

"Fine. But you can't laugh." Pat sighed, looking past Achilles and out the window as he spoke. "Ever since I saw him, I've been having these dreams. You know how you sometimes dream but you know you're dreaming? Except, these are different. It's almost like I know that I'm *not* really dreaming. That instead I'm... remembering, maybe?"

Achilles pulled his blanket up over his shoulders—the air conditioning had clicked on and he was getting chilly. "Like *deja vu*?"

"Sort of. More distinct, though. And he's always in them."

"Creepy."

Pat folded his arms on the back of his chair and leaned his chin on them. "Not really. They're.. nice. Comforting. Sometimes, I'm sitting on this riverbank and I'm so profoundly sad, like I've lost everything I care about, and then he comes and sits beside me and I feel... not better, but okay. Sometimes, I'm with him in a fight against some kind of monster, but I'm not afraid, I'm completely sure we'll win."

"Boring," Achilles yawned again, "tell me when you've had some spicy dreams about him, would you?"

"Oh, those too," Pat said. "Those are especially weird, because a lot of the time, I feel like there's someone else there, but I'm not upset by their presence, it feels normal and I like having them there, but I can't see them? Very odd."

"Completely," said Achilles. He'd known Pat long enough that this wasn't necessarily TMI, but it did force him to reconcile 'Pat, his best friend since age eight' with 'Pat, a person who had sex dreams'. "Is this why you're looking for him, then? Find out why you're having threesomes with him and a ghost?"

"That's a little reductive. But yes."

Against his better interests, Achilles asked, "what's it like? Getting fucked by a Blood Man?"

"*The* Blood Man, as far as I know, there's only one of him," Pat corrected. "And I top."

Now, Achilles was forced to reconcile all other previous mental versions of Pat with, 'Pat, a person who tops'. His brain rebelled against this. "Seems fake, but okay."

"I top in real life, too."

Achilles gestured at their otherwise empty bedroom. "Who would you even be fucking?"

"You don't know what goes on in here when you go visit your dad over the weekends." Pat was grinning, and Achilles searched through the blankets so he could toss the post-its back at Pat's face. They hit him square in the forehead, so he counted that as a win.

"Don't make me think about that. Go to sleep."

"You go to sleep. I've got research to do," Pat said, back to his laptop, as expected. Well. Achilles couldn't say he didn't try.

— — —

*Pat was underground.*

*He was also in a field, but he was somehow underground, and in a field, at the same time. When he lay back, there was grass beneath him. When he looked up, there were tree roots and crystals and earth.*

*This was a dream but was also not just a dream, and he acknowledged the truth of that, and then let it slide past him.*

*Some of the grass was burning, but he was not bothered by it. The air around him was fresh and pleasantly cool, if still. He'd been sleeping, he thought. Or maybe he'd just been lying there. He could distantly hear the trickle of the river, the one he often sat beside in his dreams, but this was not a sad river-dream. The longing, the hollowed-out feeling within him was gone. He felt fulfilled. Content.*

*Zagreus, because his name was Zagreus here, although Pat could never recall it when he woke, lay curled beside him. It was his feet that were lighting the grass aflame, though it didn't hurt when they bumped against Pat's own. This was something he'd not worried about, as if he'd already known it.*

*"You must allow us to properly thank you for this," he found himself saying. "No beating around it like before." He said us, he was talking about a third person, but every time he tried to concentrate on who it was, his thoughts slipped away.*

*"Of course I will, sir." He'd feel strange about being called 'sir' if he remembered it after. Perhaps his dream-self was a little older than his twenty-one years.*

*He felt Zagreus exhale heavily and realized belatedly that they were undressed. If anything happened between them it had already come and*



*gone. The moment they were sharing felt more like the cool bliss of an afterglow than anything.*

*"Will you miss us?" Pat asked.*

*Another sigh. "Oh, terribly." Zagreus lifted his head. Pat observed him with the ease of having done it a thousand times before. He did not focus upon his features, because he already knew them. "But you shouldn't stay because of me."*

*"We'll be back again. A life isn't so long, is it?" His waking mind was not sure why he asked this.*

*"Yes. But I fear you won't remember. Patroclus..." Zagreus called him this, in this space. Pat was never called anything but Pat, and yet it felt as if this was as much his name as 'Pat' was. "...I wish you would remember me."*

*I wish you would remember me.*

He was himself again, lying in his bed, the dream and the man who occupied it slipping away. He remembered nothing but a kind face and mismatched eyes, a crown of flames wreathing a dark head, and those words.

*I wish you would remember me.*

*"Who are you?" Pat asked the empty room.*

He heard and irritated scoff and found the room was not quite so empty. "You've known me for twelve years, Pat!"

"I wasn't talking to you," he told Achilles. He rolled onto his side, squinting at the clock on the wall. It was almost noon. "Slept in, I guess."

"Some of us had that luxury," Achilles sighed. He must have gotten back from practice, he was changing out of his running clothes and taking his hair down from its messy bun. "Maybe I'll nap before tonight, at least."

*"What's tonight?"*

Achilles climbed up the first two steps of the ladder up to Pat's bed to tell him straight to his face, "do *not* tell me you forgot about tonight."

His brain, still full of thoughts of strange creatures who lived in the darkness, took a long moment to catch up. "Oh, right. That party you wanted to go to."

"Okay, good. I was worried." He tapped Pat on the nose before hopping back down to floor level, digging through his drawers for a clean shirt. "You have to come with me."

"Not to worry, I'll be there."

He did not, technically, have to do anything, but Achilles was a difficult person to say no to even when he didn't have 'I joined you for your weird not-cryptid-hunting thing last night, and you owe me' to hold over Pat's head. Also, he knew Achilles was asking because, despite being gorgeous and talented and popular, Achilles hated being in large groups of people without Pat around. He said it tired him out. It took a lot of energy to care that much about what other people thought of you, Pat supposed.

"I'll have you know, my time was shit today because I've had no sleep, and Coach asked me if I was getting sick or something, but I'm past the point where I'm worried about that, you know, I've moved on to the giddy-tired instead of the grumpy-tired. Want to get lunch?"

"Breakfast, for me," Pat said, climbing out of his bed and once again resenting himself for picking the top bunk. He nearly tumbled straight on his ass because he missed the last rung, but Achilles grabbed him before he fell, pushing him upright.

"Right, yes, you were busy dreaming about the Blood Man." He left Pat's side and headed for the sink instead, to put his hair back up, neater this time. "I'd say you need to get laid, Pat, but apparently you've been fucking all over the place whenever I'm out of sight."

"I have not," Pat said, ignoring Achilles' grin in the mirror. "I'm simply saying that I *sometimes* have people over while you are out."

"Can't take it back now. I'm expecting some serious game tonight."

Just for that, Pat stole one of Achilles' shirts.

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At Freshman orientation, an RA had told their group, "*once you've seen one house party, you've seen them all.*" The response was more or less sarcastic disbelief, but Pat had found it was, overall, the truth.

This one had the addition of a hot tub, which was new. Pat hadn't planned for that, but became more and more interested in getting into it the worse he and Achilles lost at what was basically two games of beer pong played simultaneously on the same table. It was therefore impossible to win in the first place, and existed for the express purpose of getting very drunk very fast.

He could predict with relative accuracy how close Achilles was to doing something stupid based on how flushed his face got. He was now almost entirely pink, all the way down his chest, which Pat could see because he'd stripped off his shirt and was going for his jeans, too, because boxer-briefs were *basically* swim trunks anyway, if swim trunks were very short and very tight and okay they weren't really, but nobody wanted to get into a hot tub with jeans on.

This was good, because Pat was already in the hot tub, and it was easier to keep an eye on Achilles if he was in the same place. Not that Pat needed to keep an eye on Achilles, because Achilles was an adult who did not need to be minded. But, you know. Just in case.

This was also not good, because there was no additional room in said hot tub. Pat was already wedged between two girls who'd actually had the forethought to bring swimsuits.

"Achilles, no—" he tried, despite this having never worked in the past.

"Achilles, yes," said Achilles, predictably, before climbing directly onto Pat, taking a seat on his lap.

"You nearly made me spill my drink," Pat complained, trying to ignore the fact that Achilles was mostly unclothed and sitting in his lap. This was entirely irrelevant and he did not want to think into why he was so fixated on it.

"Well, that's your own fault for bringing such a full drink into such a, uh, precarious place. Here, let me help." 'Helping' meant stealing the cup out of Pat's hand and drinking enough of it that he made a face when he handed it back. "Ugh, god, what is in that?"

"The blood of my enemies."

"The blood of your enemies tastes like a lot of bad liquor all mixed together," Achilles said, and then went about introducing himself to the girls on either side of them. ("Ada and... Egg?" "No, *Elizabeth*." "Oh, sorry, no idea how I misheard that one." "I mean... you can call me that if you want?")

Pat lost track of the conversation from there. The girls were cousins, or maybe sisters, or maybe just sorority sisters, *oh god, Achilles, stop moving around like that*. It was so crowded that Achilles couldn't even do the decent thing and perch himself on Pat's knees, he just had his ass *directly* in Pat's lap, and the only way to relocate him would be if Pat spread his legs and sat Achilles between them, which would be *so much worse*.

Pat had always known Achilles was attractive. When they became friends in the third grade, it was because three different girls had asked Achilles to be their boyfriend, and he didn't know he could only have one girlfriend at a time, and had said yes to all of them. Enraged, they chased him until he scrambled up a tree and found Pat already sitting there. Pat had magnanimously allowed Achilles to hide with him until recess was over.

It had been like that as long as they had known one another. Girls liked Achilles, boys were jealous, sometimes boys also liked Achilles, and Pat was never bothered by it. Not until Achilles started liking them back.

He used to think it was because Achilles was his only friend. That if Achilles got a girlfriend or a boyfriend or any sort of partner, he'd spend all

his time with them and he'd forget about Pat. But that had never really been a problem, as Achilles had proven time and again. If anything, his significant other of the moment was always annoyed that Achilles spent so much time with Pat.

No, by now he'd figured out that it bothered him because Achilles was an attractive man, Pat was interested in attractive men, and Pat was interested in Achilles, specifically.

Not that he'd ever do something so stupid as to *admit* that, especially not to Achilles himself. He'd rather Achilles think Pat had a thing for the local cryptid than think Pat had a thing for him, especially now, because an unrequited crush would make living together into the worst kind of hell.

It still didn't make things any easier when Pat was drunk and Achilles was on his lap and neither of them were wearing much of anything and Achilles was at his absolute most social, flirting at anyone within shouting distance (given the volume of the music here, that mostly meant people right next to him). Achilles always said he hated how he felt like he had to 'turn on' his sociability, but he was damn good at it.

"That *can't* be a thing," Achilles was saying, and then he turned around to look at Pat, which required leaning back against him even further, his back against Pat's chest. "Hey, have you ever heard of this before? What with being so sexy and having so many lovers and all." He said it in a low, throaty croon, clearly laying it on thick, drama for the sake of drama, all that. God, Pat was weak to it anyway.

"Heard of what?" he asked, trying desperately not to shift underneath Achilles. He made for the rest of his drink, which had gotten a bit warm from the proximity to the water.

"I think you're supposed to do that with a grapefruit," said somebody across the hot tub to whom Pat had not been introduced, or perhaps he had, but he'd been focused on Achilles.

"I mean, yeah, you're *supposed* to do it with a grapefruit, but I'm talking about a donut," said the girl on their left, the one whose name Achilles had

misheard. "I mean, what else is the donut hole there for?"

"Oh my god, please don't do that. With any food. Unless you *want* to tell your doctor you gave yourself a UTI."

"Question: what if your dick is too big to fit through the donut hole?"

"Wait, what the fuck?" said Pat, absolutely bewildered by the direction this had taken.

Achilles laughed, leaning his head back on Pat's shoulder. He got like this when he drank, loose and cuddly, leaning on whoever was closest. "Sorry, Egg, don't think it's a thing."

"Then make it a thing!"

"Sure, I'll try it and report back," he said, which made several people look as if they wanted to volunteer to test this strange perversion of breakfast food out with Achilles.

Pat decided it was probably time to get out of the hot tub.

Dislodging himself from beneath Achilles was difficult but necessary, and once he was out of the water, the cool evening air felt even chillier against his skin. Probably a good thing. He'd been immensely overheated.

He pulled his jeans and T-shirt back on even though doing so over wet underwear was rather uncomfortable. The jeans were black, and even if it had been obvious, he wasn't the only one who'd gotten out of the hot tub and put clothes back on soaking wet.

Instead of heading back toward the house, Pat stepped off the back deck and into the yard, which was not fenced-in, but gave way to woods beyond. He could almost see a light bobbing in them, he thought. Not electric-bright, but warm, like a fire, except that it was moving. Unless someone had lifted one of the tiki torches for an ill-advised venture into the woods, the light seemed to fit only one person.

The Blood Man.

"Pat?" Achilles had gotten out and come after him, which Pat hadn't expected, but it didn't entirely surprise him.

"It's him. I'm going to go—" he said, gesturing toward the woods.

Achilles stuck close to Pat's side as he headed toward the light bobbing in the woods. Was it closer now, or was he just approaching with more haste?

They had to head a little ways into the woods to reach him, sticking mostly to the dirt path because neither of them had put their shoes on. The cool air chilled their wet skin and clothes, and Pat was all too aware of the eerie silence of the woods as compared to the noise of the party in the distance.

They rounded another tree and finally caught sight of the source of the light. A thrill ran through Pat as he reveled in the simple fact that *he was right*. "Look—there!" he said, grabbing for Achilles and maybe accidentally getting his chest instead of his shoulder, but whatever. "It's him!"

Not ten feet from them stood the man Pat had seen before. Black hair, one red eye that glowed bright in the dark, crowned in a wreath of flame. He was staring straight at them.

"That's not a cryptid, Pat, that's a twink with some glowing leaves on his head," said Achilles, who was wrong.

"No. Achilles, *look*—" he began, but there was no time for Achilles to observe any longer, because the Blood Man vanished into the trees a second later. Even the light was gone, and going in deeper after him would definitely require shoes. Pat frowned, then snatched his hand back when he realized it was still settled on Achilles' chest. "You can't tell me that was normal."

"Yes, but I'm also not saying it was *paranormal*, either. C'mon, Pat, let's just head back." Achilles was already turning, while Pat lingered, as if the Blood Man would reappear in the woods while he watched. That wasn't how the stories went, though.

He sighed, following after Achilles. "What are the odds, do you think, that anyone will assume we wandered into the woods together to do something other than make out?"

"Low enough that I won't have to worry about staying somewhere else, because nobody's coming home with you after that," Achilles said.

"Shit!"

"Are you really that upset about—"

"No, I left my phone—I didn't get a picture of him."

"That really is a travesty, Pat," said Achilles, who did not seem sorry at all.



## 2. Chapter 2

### Summary for the Chapter:

Pat gets a name and flirts with Death, Achilles would like to sleep, Zagreus' true mission is revealed (and it's super gay).

### Notes for the Chapter:

Ch. 2 is a day early because I have Nonsense coming out for Slut Zag Friday tomorrow! Anyhow, this is the chapter where it's kinda revealed what's going on and why this is tagged canon divergence.

*Achilles was in a strange room, opulently decorated but cluttered, with low lights and comfortable bedding. Distantly, he knew he'd never seen the place before, but in the dream, he was familiar enough to be at ease here. He was lying completely naked on the bed, which came as no surprise. Though he knew he was dreaming, he had also just woken up.*

*He was on his side, and he was not alone. There was a warm body at his back but a warmer one at his front, a smaller figure who was stirring in his arms and turning to face him, forcing Achilles to pull his head up out of a nest of dark hair.*

*"Hi," the man said, letting Achilles know he was awake. He looked up with mis-matched eyes, one green and bright, one red and dark. Achilles was not surprised by his appearance but he was stunned by how beautiful he was. He had the feeling he had been taken aback by this man's loveliness on a number of occasions already.*

*"Good morning," Achilles said, although the room was dark around them.*

*"Is it?" Zagreus asked.*

*How did Achilles know his name...?*

*"Maybe." He stretched, a little, although he kept Zagreus close to him. "It seems the proper thing to say to somebody who's just woken."*

*"Mhm." Zagreus did not seem to be concerned with Achilles' choice of greeting any longer, busying himself by kissing Achilles' neck. This close, Achilles could feel the warmth that came from his head—rather, from the crown he wore, leaves made of fire, which gave off sparks, though Achilles was not worried he would be burned. He did find himself thinking, I will have so many of these in my hair when I get up.*

*Zagreus' mouth felt distractingly nice, so much so that Achilles nearly forgot about the third occupant of the bed, until a strong arm squeezed tight around his waist, a hand groping for his chest. It was a touch as thrilling as it was familiar, and Achilles found himself leaning into it.*

*"You two do know I am supposed to be at work sometime soon, don't you?" he asked. He could feel another mouth on him now, and then Zagreus was kissing their other partner over Achilles' shoulder. He wanted to turn and look at who was behind him, but his body felt no need to, comfortable as he was with whoever it was. A man, he thought, for the chin against his shoulder was bearded.*

*Zagreus laughed as though the other had said something, although Achilles had not heard it. "As if anybody could even tell how late you are. It'll still be 7:48 when you get there, Achilles."*

*"Zagreus," he sighed, giving himself up to their touch.*

*Zagreus.*

*"What's a 'Zagreus'?" asked Pat, who was peering at him from the top bunk. Achilles woke fully and rolled onto his back, bending one of his knees to hide the way the blankets would have tented around him otherwise. It had been a very nice dream.*

*"What's a what?" he muttered, the dream already fading as he scrubbed at his face.*

"You woke up saying 'Zagreus'. What does that mean?"

"Mmmngh." His head felt blurry, not from drinking the night before but from being woken before he was ready. "Dunno. Nothing, probably."

The air conditioning was humming away, and Achilles pulled the blankets to his chest, eyes closing, fully intent on dozing again and hoping to slip into the same dream. There had been a bed there, too, he remembered, and a man... two men? Nice. Dream-Achilles had it good.

"It's a Greek god."

"What is?"

"Zagreus is."

"No, that can't be it." He burrowed his face deeper into his pillows.

"Yes, it is, I'm looking it up," Pat said, wagging his phone. "Son of Hades and Persephone, although some myths say he's the son of Zeus and Persephone, and he's the god of... some kind of hunting sacrifice situation? Not very well-known."

Achilles groaned, trying to sound very put-upon. "Let me sleep."

"What were you dreaming about?" Pat continued to pester him, the menace.

"A threesome."

Now Pat was climbing down the ladder, and Achilles was not going to get any more sleep. "With a Greek god?"

"No, with the glowing twink." Achilles frowned, not realizing what he'd said until it was already past his mouth. "With the... oh my god, Pat, you've infected me with your Blood Man dreams. Ugh. I'm not waking up until noon."

"Wait. Wait—Achilles, don't go back to sleep!"

"Augh! Get off of me!" cried Achilles, who suddenly found Pat sitting on him. It was a good way to make sure he was no longer aroused, at least. Pat squashing his legs like that wasn't very sexy.

"You're sure it was him? The Blood Man?"

He considered it for a moment. "He looked like the guy we saw last night. Probably just dreamed about him because I saw him before I went to sleep."

Pat did not get off of him. "Who was the other person?"

"I don't know, some guy. Quit questioning me about my sex dreams, Pat, that's weird." Achilles kicked, a futile attempt to get Pat to move.

"And which one was called Zagreus? the Blood Man, or the other guy?"

"It's just a dream—"

"Achilles." Pat looked at him with distinct seriousness, and more importantly, stubbornness. He wasn't getting out of this unless he told Pat whatever he knew.

"The Blood Man, I think. I can't remember the other guy's name."

"And you don't think that sounds at all familiar?"

Of course it sounded familiar. "Yes. It's like your dreams. But, have you considered: you telling me so much about your dreams got into my head and made me dream about the same thing."

"That's ridiculous," Pat said, but in that distant way, like he knew it was actually quite reasonable. His pondering gave Achilles enough time to kick him off his bed.

"Let me sleep. And don't wake me up talking about Greek gods or whatever."

"You woke yourself up talking about Greek gods."

"Mnngh."

He didn't wake until much later than noon.

— — —

"You," Thanatos said, between heavy breaths he didn't actually need to take, "are. *Insatiable*, lately. What's gotten into you?"

Zagreus giggled, because the answer to that was quite obvious now, wasn't it?

"Don't say—"

"You have."

Than groaned, batting at him weakly. He didn't give Zag any other shit, probably because he didn't have the energy to, what with Zagreus having very thoroughly put him through his paces.

"Seriously, Zag, is there a reason you've been compelled to tear my clothes off as soon as you see me as of late, or what? Even on the surface, you couldn't keep your hands off me."

"Other than my eternal love for you, which burns hotter than all the magma in Asphodel, you mean?" He rolled onto his stomach, propping his chin up on his hand so he could properly observe Thanatos, who looked like he was about to die, which was the usual after Zag made a wild declaration of love or a truly awful pun. Other than that, he looked quite well—a few centuries back, someone had finally convinced Thanatos that the population of mortals was growing beyond his purview and he needed to recruit some underlings. With the help of several different psychopomps, Than now finally had some time to relax.

Or some time to very athletically fuck Zag's brains out for a few hours or so, which was relaxing in its own way, Zagreus supposed.

"Other than that, yes," Than said, his breathing finally evening out and his gold flush fading from his skin. That was a pity, Zagreus liked making him

go all shiny. He was tempted to do it again, but even gods were limited in their desires and Thanatos trully had done a fantastic job wearing Zag out. He was all melty and happy, and it was going to take him a while to be convinced to move.

"I'm just in a good mood." He stretched, then rolled himself a little bit in Than's direction. Thanatos caught on and pulled him closer.

"You know what I think?" He wrapped his arms around Zagreus, pulling him in until his back was against Thanatos' chest. "I think you're all worked up because you've been seeing your mortal boyfriends around, but you can't get your hands on them, so you're taking out your sexual frustration on me." He accompanied this accusation with a little growl in Zagreus' ear and a squeeze of his chest that made Zag squeal and wiggle in his grip.

"I regret teaching Death to flirt!" he cried.

"That's it, isn't it? I know you've been sneaking around that school." He left a kiss just below Zagreus' ear. When he next spoke, it was less enticing, softer instead. "Zag, you really ought to be careful. You can't let them see you up there."

He shrugged, which was made difficult because of how tight Thanatos held him. "They don't know who I am," he said. "The mortals just think I'm some weird guy. And how else am I supposed to..." He sighed, and Thanatos loosened his grip to pet over his chest instead. "I promised them."

"I know you did." Another kiss, on Zagreus' shoulder this time. "They're still young, even for mortals. They'll figure it out on their own, I'm sure."

"They're older than they were when they fell in love the first time 'round," Zagreus said. Before Patroclus and Achilles agreed to return to the surface to live a second mortal life, he'd pressed them for details on how they'd come to fall for one another, and had sworn to them that he'd ensure they would be together in this life as they had in their first. They wanted to live full lives with one another, rather than a handful of years stolen from Fate before their prophetic end eventually doomed them.

And Zagreus was doing just a terrible job ensuring that they fell in love again.

"Did you ask Aphrodite?" Thanatos said.

"Yes." Zagreus sighed, turning his head so he could bump his nose against Than's cheek. "She said there was nothing she could do. I'm not sure why. Eros told me I ought not to risk the destruction his help could bring. I'm just not sure what to do, anymore. I don't want to fail them—and I don't want to waste their gift."

The 'gift' he referred to was not something from Achilles and Patroclus, but something given to them by Chaos, who promised that if the two of them loved in life as they did in death, that the God of Blood could walk on the surface unimpeded. It was how they'd been reassured that they'd have Zagreus by their side for at least some of their mortal lives, and probably had more to do with Chaos favoring Zagreus than favoring the two of them, although Chaos still insisted that this was for entertainment purposes only.

Although, given Zagreus' career of escape attempts and Chaos' reaction to that, they may very well have been entertained by Zagreus trying and failing at a task, so maybe he was achieving that.

"It might take them a while to find their feelings for one another," Thanatos said. "They live in a different culture, in a different time. Mortals don't marry so young anymore. Maybe that's all there is to it."

Zagreus patted Than's hand where it still rested over his chest. "I know you're trying to reassure me, love, but I don't think anything could, right now."

"You know, there is one thing you could do, if you wanted to be a little more sure," he said, leaning his chin on Zagreus' shoulder. "Ask Hypnos if they dream about one another. Mortals often do that when they have deep feelings for each other that they can't acknowledge while waking."

"Do they really?" asked Zagreus, who was classically bad at not simply saying whatever he was thinking.

"Mmhm."

"Oh, perfect, then I'll just—" he began, scrambling upward, but not making it very far, because Thanatos seized him around the waist and kept him still.

"No. You're staying right here until my break is over."

And alright, he wasn't going to say no to that.

— — —

"So, word has it, you've seen the Blood Man around campus." Pat felt a little like a private investigator, and also a little silly as he leaned over the bar at the campus coffeeshop to ask the barista about cryptid sightings. He liked working this way, though, by word of mouth rather than an obnoxious trail of social media posts. But eventually, 'Pryde said to ask Keaton who said to ask Jean' got a little tiresome, and Pat really hoped this was the end of the trail.

"Yeah, at least, I think it was him. I know his feet are supposed to be on fire, but is his like... hair and stuff supposed to be on fire, too?"

Sounded like the end of the trail to him. "That's the guy."

"Well, I saw him, that's for sure. He was making out with some guy behind the art building by the library," Jean said, handing Pat his coffee, which he definitely needed if he wanted to script the next narrative section of his documentary in between classes.

Alright, maybe not the end of the trail. Also, very curious. "Any idea who the person he was, uh, hanging out with was?"

A shrug. "Some grad student, I think. He's a tall guy, always dressed in black, with dark skin and white hair down to here. I don't think he'll be hard to spot, at least."

"That's true." Campus was small, and people with below-shoulder-length white hair were few and far between. "Thanks, I'll see if I can find him."



And so it led on, and this time, Pat didn't even have a name. This, somehow, actually made it more exciting.

— — —

Thanatos had never really been the most inconspicuous god to walk among mortals, but anything was better than Zagreus and his glowing feet and Hypnos with his 'accidentally forgetting not to float,' which made Thanatos a good choice to walk around campus to keep an eye on Zag's mortals. Plus, at a school with a fairly decent-sized art program, Thanatos didn't stand out as much as he would around, say, a corporate office. Art school kids wouldn't bat an eye at a young man with long white hair in a hoodie and tinted glasses, and if he kept his head down and walked with purpose, people rarely stopped him wherever he was going.

Until today.

"Do you have a moment? I wanted to ask some questions for a film project."

Thanatos was about to respond with a sharp, *"no, I'm late for a class,"* which usually worked, until he realized he'd been stopped in his tracks by Patroclus.

Pat.

Whatever he was being called these days.

He didn't look quite like the Patroclus that Than remembered, which could mostly be chalked up to being a bit younger. He didn't have as much bulk, and his hair was shorter, falling just to his shoulders and pulled half-up in a bun, a pair of black-framed glasses perched on his nose, behind which his eyes were the same warm brown. He was dressed in a sweater and a denim jacket, his beard trimmed closer to his face, but he still (and Thanatos was never in a thousand centuries telling Zagreus he had this thought) looked very attractive with it.

"So, you don't mind...?"

"Oh. It's fine, I guess." He shoved his hands in his pockets, a distinct sensation of guilt trickling down his spine. He shouldn't be the one talking to Patroclus while Zag still couldn't.

"Great, thank you. I'm Pat, by the way, nice to meet you. Jean told me about you...?" He looked as if he was waiting for some sort of recognition, and got none. Thanatos wasn't overfond of becoming attached to mortals. He often forgot names. "Anyway. Mind if I record it?"

Gods, Thanatos hated cell phones.

"Don't take any videos," he said. His voice wasn't overly distinctive, but his appearance, even as much as he tried to tone down his golden eyes with gray-violet tinted glasses, was.

"That's fine. So, the project is about local myths and legends," he said, pulling out his phone. "GFU has a weird amount of them for such a small school. Some of them are your typical abandoned buildings people say are haunted, et cetera." He pressed 'record,' holding the phone between them so it would better capture Thanatos' voice. "Mind stating your name and your major for the record?"

"I'm Than. Fine arts major." This tended to stop people asking questions, as nobody wanted to hear about a fine arts project. If they continued to press, Thanatos would say it was about the nature of death. This either made people stop asking, or start pontificating about the nature of death, which amused Thanatos in a sort of way that made him feel he was resembling his grandparent.

"Great. And have you heard the local legend of the Blood Man?"

Thanatos tried very, *very* hard not to make a face.

Zagreus.

"Yeah."

"Have you ever had any sort of experience with this being?"

Oh, he'd had an experience. He'd had a few thousand years of experiences. "Maybe," he said, desperately hoping that a vague answer would deter Pat from any more questions.

The vague answer only seemed to spur him on, and he got a sly sort of look that Thanatos remembered from Patroclus' shade. He'd worn it once before reading Thanatos for absolute filth and telling him with no foundational evidence yet complete certainty that Thanatos had been in love with Zagreus long before Zag even noticed Than's existence.

And he'd been right, dammit.

"You know, that's a very strange answer to that question," he said. "The Blood Man is a pretty obvious presence. Most people know whether or not they've seen him."

Thanatos tried hard not to bristle, because if he truly hadn't encountered Zagreus in the wild, as it were, he wouldn't be upset about being probed about it. He shoved his hands into his pockets and felt this gesture only incriminated him further. "I... think I've seen him."

Patroclus nodded, and the sly look did not disappear from his face. Fox-like, that one. If Athena hadn't been so fixated on Odysseus, she might've tried for this mortal. Actually, it was entirely possible she'd asked him first and he'd told her he'd rather not be bothered.

"And how would you respond to the fact that an eyewitness claimed they saw somebody of your description getting *very* up-close and personal with the Blood Man?"

He had to concentrate very hard to keep from flushing. The pallor of his skin was already strange to mortals, although they usually thought it just made him look a bit sick. Blushing bright gold was beyond what they'd be able to pass off as normal.

He'd fucking *told* Zagreus somebody would see them.

"I..." he grasped at an excuse—of course, the majority of the excuses he'd ever heard came from his brother, so the next thing that came out of his mouth was: "I was pretty high."

Now, Hypnos had once referred to Thanatos as 'so straight-edge it's a wonder he's even gay' which was not true in a multitude of directions, but did properly represent how little Thanatos cared for being inebriated. He was banking on the fact that Pat didn't know this, and on the fact that he'd just said he was a fine arts major, which, next to undeclared majors and philosophy students, were most likely to be high at any given moment.

"So high you don't remember if he had one red eye and was glowing?" Pat continued to press him.

Thanatos shrugged. The best lies, he was told, had some kernel of honesty, so he continued. "I don't usually... so, I guess it hit me pretty hard. My brother's more of, well."

Pat got a strange look on his face, which turned into recognition. "Hypnos?"

*Could one person in the goddamn underworld just not wander around talking to mortals?*

"Yeah."

"Is that actually his real name? I asked him if it was Hypnos like, 'hypnosis' and he told me they named hypnosis after him."

Thanatos nudged the glasses out of the way so he could pinch the bridge of his nose. "It's as much his real name as anything."

This time, Pat didn't call him on his non-answer. "Well, alright. I'm told he's the person you go to if you want to get fucked up, so. I suppose after he's through with you, you could miss a... what was it Achilles—a 'twink with glowing leaves on his head'."

Oh, he was so telling Zagreus they called him that.

He couldn't hide his smirk, and Pat smiled back at him, a little less amused on somebody else's behalf and a little more genuine. "Too bad it wasn't a more memorable kiss. I'm out of leads on him, now." He sighed, thumbing the pause button on the recording. "Would you mind if I gave you my number?"

"Sure?"

Hypnos had insisted on him getting a cell phone, despite the fact that they both could *fucking teleport*, so he did have something Pat could enter his phone number in.

"You know, in case you recall anything," he clarified. "Or in case you want a kiss you can remember."

That *did* make him flush, and he clapped a hand over his face to do his best to hide it.

"I. Um. Okay," he said, which was completely idiotic. Blood and darkness, he wished he could just end this conversation by vanishing. Turning around and walking away wasn't half as good.

And damn it if he wasn't just a little bit pleased that Patroclus of this time period smirked like that when he managed to fluster somebody, too.

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Halloween, Achilles makes a move, Pat has no idea how this happened, honestly, Hypnos is moderately helpful.

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Hello happy Friday it's KISS TIME!!!!!! but ya gotta wait til next chapter for the porn. sorry.

Inviting Hypnos to the lounge for a drink was always a dangerous gamble, because it was entirely possible he'd just fall asleep mid-conversation. Zagreus didn't really want to have this talk in the hall where his father could eavesdrop, though—of course, Hades knew that Zag's lovers had reincarnated and Hades also knew his son well enough to guess that Zag was going to go looking for them, but he'd still chastise Zag for it if he heard it talked about anywhere in his vicinity, and honestly, Zagreus would rather not.

"So, Thanatos thought maybe... if they dream about one another?"

"Oh, they sure do!" Hypnos said brightly, tipping back and then righting himself as if he was sitting in a rocking chair, even though he was just hovering in midair. "Not very often, but they definitely have before."

"That's great!" Zagreus perked up in his seat, nearly knocking over the bottle of nectar as he leaned in conspiratorially. "So, is there any chance you could influence them to, uh, maybe do that a little more often?"

Hypnos snorted, pulling up his sleep mask, which had sunk down over his eyes a little, to give Zagreus a more obvious wink. "Who do you think I am, buddy?"

"I think you're the best!" He hugged Hypnos, which was made much easier by the fact that Hypnos was wrapped in his duvet of a cloak (he was very

pointy without it).

"Right?" Hypnos laughed, burying himself further into his cloak. "Well, I'll do my best. There's no guarantee this'll knock the two of them out of the closet, but it'll be a step toward the door, if you will."

He wouldn't, mostly because he had no idea what Hypnos was talking about. He was pretty sure the rooms at the university did not have closets big enough that somebody could fit in one.

"Okay, then," he said anyway, and made for his room, shouting over his shoulder. "I'm just gonna! Go up there and check things out! For security!"

"Mm-hm." Hypnos tugged down his mask as Zagreus left, rocking backwards once again, this time without popping back up. He was snoring by the time the door closed behind Zag.

Pat was researching again. He'd been doing an ecology paper, but he must've finished that, because his notes and his constant muttering to himself all sounded very Blood-Man-related.

Achilles had lived with Pat since freshman year, had planned for it since high school, and had always been glad he didn't have to room with some random person he'd never met who had some annoying habit he couldn't stand. When they decided to put the beds into an L-shaped bunk and fit Pat's desk right next to Achilles' bed, he'd not been bothered by the idea, knowing that Pat studying late into the night would probably just prompt Achilles to actually do his own homework.

Even now, he wasn't bothered by Pat reading through his copious amount of notes aloud to himself. No, that was actually kind of endearing.

What was *bothering him* was the dream he'd woken up from last night. And the night before that. And all this week, actually, now that he'd thought of it.

They weren't like the Blood Man dreams, the weird series of almost-recollections and people he couldn't quite see. No, the absolutely recognized the person he was with in these dreams, which were *all* sex

dreams, by the way, like he'd reverted to being sixteen all of a sudden. And rather than being about cryptids or celebrities or vague impressions of people he'd never met, they were *all about Pat*.

This wasn't the first time he'd had a dream like that about Pat. In fact, he was pretty sure he'd had a handful of them, but it wasn't like he kept count, and he did usually make solid attempts to forget them as soon as he woke up. That felt like the polite, friendly thing to do.

This *was* the first time he'd had *four of them in a row*.

These weren't just nebulous 'oh maybe that was a thing I dreamed about' sorts of situations either. They were vivid as hell, wildly creative about how flexible either of them were, and had made morning showers an absolute necessity. Achilles was glad of several things, including: he rarely moved or talked in his sleep, he slept on his side (facing away from Pat's desk), he got up for class while Pat was still fast asleep every day, and they didn't share a bathroom.

He was, however, seriously regretting the decision to put Pat's desk right by his bed. Of course, one of the dreams had started this way, with Pat studying and Achilles slowly inching closer—all Pat had to do was angle his chair a little in Achilles' direction, and then Achilles leaned in, and...

"Was that your phone or mine?" Achilles asked, even though he knew it wasn't his phone, his phone was wedged somewhere between his pillow and his hip, and he'd checked it only a moment ago in yet another desperate attempt to distract himself, because the book he was reading sure wasn't doing anything.

Pat flipped his phone over, then grinned at it. "Thought he'd never text me back."

"Who?"

"This guy I met." Pat reached blindly for the coffee cup that was in the corner of his desk, tried to take a sip, and then realized it was empty. "I was talking to him about the Blood Man—"



"As you do."

"As I do, yes. He was the guy the barista said was making out with the Blood Man?" He asked this as if Achilles might have forgotten that detail, and how thoroughly he'd teased Pat for being jealous over it. "Anyway, he's strange but he's very good-looking."

"And obviously you share a kink."

"Ha." It was very sarcastic laughter for somebody drinking out of a coffee mug that said *'Mothman is my Boyfriend'* on it in bright red. "What does it mean if you ask somebody to go to the Halloween party at the roller skating rink and they say they're busy that night? Is he actually busy, or am I being politely rejected?"

While Achilles didn't particularly care to talk about Pat's romantic prospects, it was indeed better than thinking about his unfortunate series of dreams. "I think it means nobody wants to roller skate while wearing a Halloween costume. Or nobody wants to roller skate, period."

"It's a good party, though," said Pat, as if he hadn't dragged Achilles there every year since they'd stopped trick-or-treating.

"Ask him to a haunted house, instead. Then when he gets scared, you can—no, what am I saying, this goes against everything your monster-fucker tendencies stand for. And his, I'm assuming."

"Okay."

"No, don't actually—"

"No, it's a good idea. You've given me the idea, you live with the consequences," Pat said, spinning his chair away from Achilles so that Achilles couldn't steal his phone. "You should come too."

"What, and third-wheel you and this guy?" Achilles gripped the back of his chair, trying to spin it back around, but Pat had wedged his feet under one

of the rungs of the ladder leading up to his bed, which made him impossible to move.

"We'll make it a group thing. And his name is Than, by the way."

"His name is what?"

"Than," Pat repeated. "T-H-A-N. He didn't put his last name in my phone."

He spun his chair back around, and Achilles, still holding onto the back, was knocked off-balance. He had to grip the arm of the chair to keep himself from pitching fully forward into Pat's lap, the position so similar to what Achilles had dreamed up a few nights ago, it took all his focus not to get a very unfortunately-timed erection. God. He'd never even given anybody a blowjob before, and yet his dream had him so convinced it'd be *so good*.

Pat helped him back up, grabbing his shoulders and pushing him upright again. "Anyway, you should come with me whether or not this guy agrees, I wanna go to one this year," he said, as if Achilles hadn't just almost fallen into his lap.

"Fine, but if you start asking all the monsters if they've seen the Blood Man, I'm gonna pretend I don't know you."

— — —

"Zagreus."

Here's the thing about loving someone for several thousand years. You got to learn exactly what their tone of voice meant in any and all scenarios, and so Zagreus could very clearly tell that this was a bad 'Zagreus' and not a good 'Zagreus' or even just a neutral acknowledgment that Zag had come walking past the balcony where Than liked to spend his time.

"Hi, love." Might as well start things off sweet.

"Your mortal boyfriend is flirting with me." Thanatos was sitting on the couch he told Zag he didn't like, looking at one of those mortal

communication devices which must have been blessed by Hermes, or else it wouldn't work down here. Zagreus had been meaning to get one, only the mortals kept changing which ones they used so often he couldn't keep track.

It was altogether baffling.

"What do you mean, 'my mortal boyfriend is flirting with you'?" 'Mortal boyfriend' meant Achilles or Patroclus. This bore further investigation. He sat beside Thanatos on the couch, squinting at the screen, which was difficult to read. Zag's red eye especially did not like bright lights.

"You remember when I ran into Patroclus," Than said, pressing a button on the side of the device that made the screen go black. He leaned against the arm of the chaise, his feet tucked up under him. He was only so relaxed because the House had decided it was late at night, and there were no shades milling about, save for the chef working on some early prep. Nobody to see Death putting his feet up. "He's been talking to me since then. Sending me text messages."

"Oh, right, I've forgotten they can do that now." Zagreus reached for the... what was it called again? Phone. He reached for the phone in Thanatos' lap, and when he pushed the button on the face of it, all it said was '7:48'. "How do I see what he said?"

"It's not important. He asked me to go on a date with him, to some haunted house—"

"You should do it!"

Thanatos looked at him like he'd gone absolutely crazy. "Why? Aren't we trying to get him to fall in love with Achilles?"

"Well, yes, but if you do it and it goes very badly, maybe—"

"This sounds like a convoluted plan. Are you causing shenanigans, Zagreus?"

"I think it's more like hijinks." Zag pushed the button on the phone again, and it prompted him to enter a passcode. "Let me in! I want to talk to him."

"Zagreus, no. No hijinks."

He tried T-H-A-N. The phone unlocked, and Zagreus' next challenge was to remember which of these colorful squares was the 'talk to boys' one. There weren't many to choose from, Than kept less colorful squares on his phone than most mortals did. He didn't even have the one that had a weird bat—sorry, a *bird*—on it.

This was made additionally challenging because Thanatos was trying to steal the phone back. "You can't just—!"

"You're the one who made your passcode your name!" Ah, yes, the green one with the weird circle.

Thanatos didn't actually write people's names into his phone, but there were only two conversations to choose from. It became pretty obvious that the first one was Hypnos, so he moved to the second.

*Is this a date.* That one was definitely Than.

*Would you be interested in it if it were?* Ah, this was clever of Patroclus. Or maybe just normal. Zagreus wasn't certain how mortals did romance. He'd never been, really.

"Blood and darkness, Zagreus—" Than said, batting at him while he poked at the keyboard.

"I've already said yes!"

Thanatos made an emphatic noise of frustration.

"Listen, all you've got to do is go on this date, and really screw it up, so that he's so frustrated he *has* to go to Achilles." Zagreus handed his phone back now that his hijinks had been set in motion.

Than groaned, slouching back on the arm of the couch. It was quite dramatic for him, and not his usual brand of drama, either. It was cute. "And how am I supposed to do that?"

"I dunno. You've done alright at sexually frustrating me so badly I've slept with Achilles instead," Zagreus reasoned.

"That was because of my unrealized love for you that I didn't know how to express."

"Pretend you've got unrealized love for him, then."

Thanatos groaned again, and then he vanished into thin air, as he was prone to doing.

He did leave Zagreus with his phone, however.

— — —

Honestly, the shit Zagreus got him into.

One would think that after countless centuries, Thanatos would be used to it, but humanity kept inventing new and creative things that Zagreus could then use to fuck with Than. This was sometimes good, sometimes bad, always mind-boggling, and as Than waited in the chilly autumn air outside a run-down Victorian home with 'The Haunted Manor' emblazoned on the gates, he once again came to the conclusion that things would never get dull with Zag.

His texts to Patroclus were creative, casually flirty but in a way that still sounded like Thanatos, if Thanatos would ever put effort into flirting with a mortal. He had to give it to Zag, he was good with his words.

Pat arrived with Achilles in tow, and nobody else, even though he'd claimed they were planning on about three or four other people. 'A group thing,' he'd called it. Apparently, two or three had cancelled, which meant it was just them and Achilles, and Thanatos wasn't sure whether this was better or

worse with regard to Zag's whole 'blow this date so that Pat falls for Achilles instead' plan.

Pat put his arm around Thanatos when he arrived, which was something nobody but a handful of Chthonic denizens had ever done. Being a mortal, Pat was almost as warm as Zag. He said he was glad Thanatos could make it. Thanatos still wasn't sure he agreed.

Achilles was giving him sort of a sideways look. Appraising. Thanatos recognized it. Achilles had given it to him before. It said, "*are you good enough for him?*" Last time, it'd been in reference to Zagreus, and it had made Thanatos wish so desperately for that approval he'd been terrified by it. This time...

Well, this time, he wasn't really sure what he'd do with Achilles' approval if he even managed to achieve it.

"So, the two of you met because of Pat's... cryptid thing?" Achilles asked, as they waited in line. Pat's arm wasn't around Thanatos anymore but he still stood close enough that Than could feel his warmth. It wasn't chilly enough that their breath condensed in the air, which was good, because Than's probably wouldn't.

"The Blood Man, right?" Thanatos asked it like he couldn't fully remember, even though he knew exactly what everyone on this campus called Zagreus, and a number of the rumors about him, besides. Zagreus had an unfortunate reputation. Unfortunate not because it was negative, but because it was mostly positive and entirely strange, and this led people like Pat to come seeking after him. "Any new leads?" *Did Zagreus go sneaking around any more parties?*

"There's an ornithology professor who said he showed up for a lecture one time. Apparently he asked a *lot* of questions."

Blood and darkness, Zag. Really?

"Is he a student, then?" Somebody moved past them, behind Thanatos, and Pat rested a hand on the center of his back to nudge him out of the way of

oncoming foot traffic. He also left his hand there. Thanatos, for his part, did not step away from the touch.

"Not as far as anybody knows," he said. Damn. If everyone just assumed Zagreus was a wayward student, this would be a lot easier for him. "There are some rumors, but that's all."

"Pat," Achilles whined, knocking the toe of his boot against the heel of Pat's. They were both dressed for the weather, in boots and denim (and a very nice leather jacket in Pat's case). "I said I'd third-wheel a date, not a Blood Man conversation."

"Achilles, you're not—"

"No, I wouldn't be if anybody else had showed up. But I definitely am a third wheel. Aren't I, Than?"

"I'd rather not answer that," said Thanatos.

Pat laughed and squeezed his shoulder. It was something his shade had done once, too. Thanatos would have to try hard not to compare the two.

The haunted house was well put-together, although Thanatos did not find himself inclined to be afraid of any of it. It was difficult to scare immortals. Thanatos knew best that his kind were not intimidated by Death.

Patroclus seemed amused by this, outright laughing as somebody with a chainsaw jumped out at them in the yard and Achilles shrieked, but Thanatos stared placidly ahead. There was no real danger of death here, anyway.

"They shouldn't be able to jump out at you in the *yard*," Achilles claimed, ruffled by his own outburst. He was not as fearless as the previous Achilles, but he was just as prideful. "It's a haunted *house*, they shouldn't be able to do that until you're *in the house*!"

"Yeah, sure," said Patroclus, who perhaps more closely resembled his shade.

It was inside the house that Thanatos noticed they were being followed.

Achilles and Patroclus probably did not realize it, but Thanatos recognized that particular quality of light—like firelight, but more contained, and yet more erratic, bobbing back and forth. If Zagreus really wanted to hide among the mortals, he ought to find a way to dim his laurel.

He was up on a higher portion of the house, behind a balustrade with a walkway overlooking the living room below. Thanatos couldn't see the stairs that led up there—it was likely they were attached to another room, and were only used by the staff running the haunted house.

Somebody dressed like a zombie leapt in front of his face, and Thanatos stared at them and wrinkled his nose. The makeup was intended to make them look like half their face was rotting off, but Thanatos had seen every sort of rotting corpse the world had to offer, and it was not very accurate. "You'll have better luck with him," he said, pointing at the back of Achilles' blond head.

While Achilles and Patroclus were distracted by the creature of the night descending upon them, Thanatos stepped backward into the shadows, and then, without his customary death-toll, vanished.

— — —

Zagreus would never grow used to Thanatos materializing just behind him, but he managed not to yelp.

He did not manage not to topple over, although Thanatos reached for him and kept him upright before he made too much of a crash.

"What are you doing here."

"Did you leave the two of them alone?" Zagreus asked. "That's a good strategy. Maybe they'll—"

"Zagreus. Somebody is going to see you."



"Somebody always sees me," Zagreus said, waving away the notion that it was anything but trivial. The mortals were always nice to him, if a little wary, and he was kind to them in return. Mortals saw the gods plenty of times, Zagreus just happened to be one of those who was more notably supernatural in appearance than, say, Dionysus, who'd reportedly accidentally ended up at a mortal emergency room recently. "How are they? Do they seem close? Did you—Than, hey!"

He was grumbling because Thanatos pulled him out of the line of sight to the room below, dragging him until they were crouched behind some boxes of supplies. He'd barely gotten a look at Achilles, but he'd been able to pick him out because of his hair. He couldn't see Pat at all. "Just come back here. You're too obvious."

"Trying to drag me into dark corners so you can have your way with me, I see," Zagreus teased, though he wouldn't mind if Thanatos made good on that.

Even just spotting a glimpse of Achilles had Zagreus giddy. It had been some twenty years now since he'd last held Achilles, since the extended time he'd spent with the two of them before they parted, and he felt each year *sorely*. It was like the way he felt when Thanatos was gone for an extended period of time, combined with the aching longing he'd felt before he and Patroclus and Achilles became lovers. That latter feeling was worsened by the fact that the two of them didn't even know Zagreus existed any longer.

He wiggled where he'd been pulled into Thanatos' lap, excitement thrumming through him. "Don't start that," Thanatos told him. "I have to go back down there with them."

"As if disappearing on him wouldn't ruin the date perfectly well," Zagreus said.

"I suppose. But they're going to be looking for me if I don't come out of the house.

I... wouldn't want to worry them." He handled these words with something very like surprise. Thanatos wasn't used to caring for mortal feelings.

Of course, Zagreus had to tease him about this. "Enjoying your date that much?"

He was damningly quiet.

"Oh?"

"I... I did not realize I had missed them." Thanatos tipped his head forward, against Zagreus' chest. "I did not realize I cared for them. I think this is a pattern, for me."

Zagreus didn't need to say he thought as much, too. "You care for them like you care for me," he clarified instead. "Your feelings for them are romantic."

"Ugh."

"Is that a nod? I can't tell if you're nodding, your face is stuck in my tits still."

"My face is not—" he drew back. It was dim, but Zagreus swore he was flushed. "Yes. Yes, I have feelings for them. But Zag, they are... different, now. They aren't the same Achilles and Patroclus you remember."

He shrugged, trying not to betray the fact that of course he'd worried about that, all the history between him and the two of them would be gone. This Achilles was not his beloved mentor who taught him everything he knew, this Patroclus was not the lonely spirit he'd found in Elysium and steadily befriended. "They are the same souls. And I will love them the same. As will you, apparently."

"You know I don't intend to *do* anything about it."

"And why not? Your chances are better than mine are."

Thanatos really was blushing now, startled as if he had not realized this. "Ugh," he said again.

"I mean, you're currently on a date with one of them. Kiss him, or something."

The sound he made resembled Charon's voice more than anything. But he did vanish again, ostensibly back down wherever Patroclus and Achilles were, which Zagreus counted as a success.

Well, maybe a success. Than had previously tried to explain to him that mortals had become weird about having more than one partner at a time, so perhaps Thanatos kissing Patroclus would not be the best way to ensure that Pat and Achilles fell in love again.

Zagreus was pretty sure he didn't have much to worry about in the department of Than Kissing People, anyway.

— — —

Achilles wasn't sure why he was so bothered by this guy.

Maybe it was because 'Than' was a weird fucking name. Maybe it was because he'd randomly disappeared for the majority of the haunted house experience, but Pat didn't seem at all annoyed about that. Maybe it was because he was so goddamn socially awkward, and yet Pat seemed enthralled by him anyhow, and if *Achilles* was on this date he would have done so much better and was Than even really hot enough to merit all the attention from Pat?

Maybe it was the fact that even though he was on a date with Pat, Than kept shooting these weird glances at Achilles, like he was trying to stare at him while Achilles wasn't looking. That was just creepy.

Maybe it was the tinted glasses that he wore, even at night.

God. Achilles should not have let Pat go out with somebody who wore tinted glasses for the aesthetic.

There was a stand in the backyard of the haunted house that was selling popcorn and hot apple cider and Than had turned down both on the verdict

of not liking sweets. He and Pat were sitting on part of the stone wall that surrounded the yard, shoulder to shoulder, and Pat was showing him clips of his Blood Man stuff and Achilles was furious because Than didn't even seem *interested* but Pat was still all starry-eyed. And it was more than the usual excitement he wore whenever he told Achilles about his research. He had a crush. And it was irritating.

It might've been rude to head out early, but he'd rather walk back to the dorm alone than watch Pat fawn over some weird art student who dyed his hair white and wore purple glasses.

The fall air was chilly, and Achilles stuck his hands in his pockets as he walked, making his way back toward campus. Greenfield was a tiny town in the absolute middle of nowhere, its only noticeable feature being the university. Achilles could make his way back to campus at three A.M. blind drunk, so midnight and slightly grumpy was no problem.

This area of the neighborhood was quiet enough that Achilles walked down the center of the road instead of worrying about tripping over sidewalks that had been split in half by tree roots or overgrown with moss.

It also didn't have any streetlamps, which meant that cryptids with glowing feet were quite obvious when they watched you from the other side of the street.

Achilles stopped in his tracks, frozen in a panic, his eyes locked with the Blood Man's.

"Oh. Hi." It was the first thing he'd heard the Blood Man say, and he sounded so *normal*, Achilles was now leaning heavily toward the 'just an engineering student with a weird costume' camp. He wasn't sure how an engineering student with a weird costume would make the glowing lights on his head pop away like sparks and flutter to the ground without actually setting anything on fire, though.

"Hello?" Now he *really* wished Pat had come with him. He'd have to memorize every detail of this conversation, so he could report on it later.

"Sorry, um, you weren't supposed to see me."

"You're a little obvious." Augh. Don't insult the cryptid, Achilles.

He didn't seem bothered, though. His face was a little hard to see, but he was laughing. "I don't have long to stay around here," he said. "I just... wanted to see you."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "You mean a lot to me, that's all."

That was when he sunk down into the ground. It was dark, but Achilles could see that some sort of puddle had sprung up under his feet, and he'd bet anything that it was red. This was why they'd named him. And this meant he was about to disappear. Shit.

"Wait! What's your name?" Achilles called out to him, as he sunk lower, folding in half at the waist like a puppet whose strings had been cut, with a little noise of pain. "Zagreus?" he tried.

His head lifted. Achilles' attention was drawn by the vibrant red of his eye, glowing in the dark. "How do you know—"

And then he vanished.

Achilles crossed the road, examining the place the Blood Man had disappeared. Even though his hands shook when he got out his phone and turned on the flashlight, he could tell it was ordinary ground, just somebody's yard.

The light caught on something then, glimmering among the grass.

It was a leaf, tiny and gold, only about the size of Achilles' thumbnail. And it had come from his crown.

Achilles no longer believed that the Blood Man was a bored engineering student.

— — —

Pat was over the *moon* when Achilles showed him the leaf. He made Achilles repeat the story twice over, then once more for the camera. He photographed the leaf from every angle. He walked with Achilles back to the place he'd seen the Blood Man vanish and had puzzled over the empty patch of grass with him.

"This is the biggest breakthrough I've had in weeks," he announced, gesturing grandly with the coffee they'd picked up on the way back from looking at grass. Not that Pat needed the energy. "Achilles, I could kiss you."

Achilles laughed, shaking his head. "I don't know if your new boyfriend would like that."

"He wouldn't mind." Pat occupied himself with a sip of his coffee. "He's apparently got another partner. They're... polyamorous, or something. I don't know. He just mentioned it off-hand. Oh! Also, he's not my boyfriend! We went on one date."

The fact that this defense came second was, in Achilles' opinion, a bit telling. "Is he coming with you to the Halloween party?"

"No, he says he doesn't like crowds." That would be a good reason to avoid the university's unofficial Halloween party, which spanned several frat houses and always had what seemed to be a solid half the student body in attendance.

"Well, good. I don't want you going off and doing a couple's costume without me."

Pat was now filming the leaf, showing the way the light reflected off it. It wasn't on fire the way it was when they were attached to the Blood Man's head, but it did have an unearthly glow to it. Pat had turned the lights off for full effect. "Never fear, Achilles, I'm still going to do your stupid costume idea."

"It's easy. And you have a ton of plaid."

"I'm just saying, I don't think anyone's going to realize we're supposed to be dressed like hipster vampires. I think they're just going to think we're dressed like ourselves, but with fangs."

"Excuse you," Achilles said, recoiling, "I do not dress like a hipster."

If he did, after all, he'd have no need to borrow one of Pat's shirts.

— — —

*Than (10:59 P.M.) bobbing for apples. someone would drown.*

*Pat (11:01 P.M.) Pumpkin carving has knives tho*

*Than (11:01 P.M.) not good knives. you'd go to the er but you wouldn't die.*

Pat decided he was officially the most boring person at this party. He was dressed not like a hipster vampire, just like a hipster (because he'd taken out the fangs when he started to worry that he'd swallow one by accident), and now he was standing in the corner texting his not-boyfriend about what would be the easiest way to get killed at a Halloween party. Of course, at a party like the one Pat was at, the easy answer was 'alcohol poisoning,' but that wasn't as interesting as Than's weirdly accurate answers.

Achilles had disappeared a while ago, Pat was pretty sure he'd been roped into a game of truth or dare, which Pat hadn't been aware anybody played anymore. Pat had run into a couple of people he knew from classes, had a couple of drinks, hung around for the costume contest judging, but now he was holed up in a corner with a half-empty cup of punch (probably punch?) and talking to Than.

He'd just been caught up in another conversation because somebody in his film studies class stopped to tell him about a costume of the Blood Man they'd seen earlier today which had consisted of a guy in a bedsheet toga with fake blood all over his feet ("it's *fire* on his feet, not blood," Pat felt obligated to say) when Achilles ran at him.

Pat was used to Achilles running at him. As a matter of fact, they'd had an entire summer between sophomore and junior year of high school where their favorite activity was running at one another and seeing who could jump on who's back first. It went on for a good long while, until Patroclus split his head open, right on his left eyebrow. He still had the scar.

Pat was not used to Achilles running at him and kissing him.

It was messy because of the velocity of the kiss, and because Pat didn't know what was happening until Achilles got his mouth on him. Achilles grabbed Pat's hair in one hand (the bun made a very convenient handle) and his shoulder in the other, and he tasted like maybe-punch, and he was warm and he was crushed up against Pat's body and he was *not stopping*.

Maybe if Pat was a better friend or more sober or just *not half in love with Achilles, already*, he would have stopped him, asked what was going on.

Pat was none of those things, and so instead he kissed back.

It was heat and it was a blur and as Pat kissed him, he thought he should commit this to memory, but the shivery brush of Achilles' tongue across the roof of his mouth made his head spin and the soft noise Achilles made when Pat gripped his hips made his mind blank out entirely except for *Achilles, Achilles, Achilles*. Pat was vaguely aware that he'd dropped his drink. He was more immediately aware of Achilles pressing the two of them tight together, tight enough that when he really got into it, Pat could *feel* it, and that was him—he did that, *he* made Achilles hard, and although he still had no idea what made Achilles kiss him in the first place, he'd managed to affect Achilles just as much as Achilles affected him.

Thank god Achilles seemed to have ditched the vampire fangs, too.

Someone in the background wolf-whistled. Pat was struck with the abrupt memory of what Achilles had been doing while Pat hung in the corner texting a guy he'd been on one date with, and he dragged himself away, only for Achilles to plant another kiss on his mouth.



God, Pat shouldn't have sunk into the second one as badly as he'd sunk into the first, but Achilles was impossible to resist, especially for somebody this weak for him. At this rate, Pat was never going to stop, and then they'd be Those People, the ones who were too-drunk and grinding up against a wall at the party, and as embarrassing as that should have been, Pat *wanted* it.

But he also had at least one remaining working brain cell, so the second time he tried to pull away, he ducked out of Achilles' way.

"Did someone..." He was panting. He was out of breath, because Achilles had stolen it from him. "Did someone dare you to do that?"

Achilles had never lied to him, and didn't start now. "Yes," he said. "Thank god."

"What...?"

"If they hadn't, I might've never known how much I wanted that. *Fuck*. I was an idiot." Then Achilles was kissing him again, although Pat was a little too stunned to kiss him back this time around. "God, I was so mad about you getting a boyfriend. Couldn't work out why." He kissed Pat again, and then he ground forward against him again and then he *moaned*, and Pat seriously couldn't take this anymore.

"Achilles, you can't—"

"Shit," Achilles breathed, pulling back, peeling himself off of Pat's body. "I shouldn't have. You didn't want. *Fuck*."

"No, you ass, I've wanted you for years, I just—"

"*Years!?*" This was loud enough that the nearby partygoers, who'd started ignoring them, looked in their direction.

"Yes, Achilles, exactly."

"Years?" he repeated, quieter, brows furrowed, his lower lip between his teeth. "Pat, you never told me."

It made him laugh, sharp and a little irritated, before he could stop himself. Because when was he supposed to have told Achilles? When they were in middle school and every word of affection Achilles gave another boy was preceded with 'no homo'? When they were in high school and Achilles talked about every girlfriend he had like he was going to marry her? When they were freshmen in college and Achilles told Pat about how he finally slept with a guy and, *"oh my god it was so good, he was amazing, do you think he'll ask me out again?"*

"I never thought you wanted me." It was the best he could do to summarize.

"I want you," Achilles breathed.

"That's fairly obvious, now."

"Are you sure?" Achilles asked, even though he was canting his hips forward, letting Pat feel exactly how much Achilles wanted him. "Because I'll suck your dick right here, if you want, I don't care."

"Please don't do that, the TA for my gen psych class is in here and I have to review my essay topic with him on Monday and I really don't want to have to look somebody in the eyes if they might've seen you sucking my—ah, Achilles!" the end of his request was cut short because Achilles took it as an opportunity to shove his hands down the back of Pat's pants.

"Are you *really* sure?" he repeated, squeezing Pat's ass just to fuck with him.

"Yes, god. Let's just go back home."

He didn't realize quite how that sounded until Achilles announced, "the man's taking me home!" to the room at large.

Thank god the walk back to their dorm wasn't long, because Pat wasn't sure how much more of this he could stand before he tackled Achilles into a bush, or something. Achilles spent the entire walk over with his hand in Patroclus' back pocket, occasionally groping him.

The two of them lived on the fourth floor of their dorm building, and usually took the stairs (except for move-in day, because there was no way Patroclus was lugging the contents of his bookshelves up four flights of stairs). Despite this, Achilles took Pat's hand, tugging him toward the elevator doors. He thumbed the 'up' button and grinned in a sort of way that made Pat certain of what was about to happen as soon as he got inside. Once those doors slid shut, he was going to have the absolute life kissed out of him, and he was going to love it.

This plan was summarily ruined when a group of girls dressed as zombie cheerleaders made their way into the elevator behind Achilles and Pat, and asked them to go to the sixth floor.

The dorm elevators were small—three people in them had them at what should have been capacity, and six was far too many. Pat fit himself into the corner, out of the way, which meant that Achilles backed up against him, pressing even further backwards when the elevator started moving.

God, if Pat thought Achilles sitting on his lap in a crowded hot tub was bad, Achilles backing up against him in a crowded elevator was so much worse. He wasn't just incidentally making contact with him now, either, but purposefully pushing back against him, arching his back just a little to grind back against Pat's crotch.

Pat was going to kill him.

Or fuck him.

Either.

They reached their room, and went to neither of their beds.

The futon was the obvious choice, anyway, it folded out into a double, not that either of them had the inclination to pause to unfold it. Achilles pushed Pat onto it first and then straddled him, giggling about something, possibly the look on Pat's face as he watched Achilles unbutton his shirt, slow, but not because he was teasing.

"How drunk are you right now?" Pat asked, because whatever had been in the punch-that-was-mostly-liquor was strong enough that Pat was still in a pleasant haze of tipsiness, and half his cup had been spilled when Achilles tackle-kissed him.

"I can still do it."

"No, that's not what I'm—Achilles, I don't want our first time to be when one of us is..." He gestured a hand at Achilles' general person.

"Stop being reasonable. I don't like when you're reasonable."

"But you admit that I'm reasonable," Pat said. He was still having a little trouble with the reasonableness, given that Achilles was still sitting on his lap, and had only slightly hesitated in his progress of removing his shirt. Pat's shirt. Because Achilles was still in Pat's shirt.

"Mmmhmn. Ugh." Achilles pitched forward at the end of this nonsensical string of words, flattening himself onto Pat's chest. "You feel so good, though." His face was tucked beneath Pat's chin now, nuzzling him there. "Have I ever told you how much I like your beard?"

"You once told me I looked like a bear."

"That's a cop... compliment." Achilles heaved a sigh so deep Pat could feel it in his own chest. "You're right. God, I would regret it forever if I didn't remember every second of this. I really like you, Pat. Like, really. You should be my boyfriend, like for *real* my boyfriend, none of this 'he's not actually because we only went on one date' thing with Glasses Guy."

"I forgot how ramblingly you get when you're drunk." Pat settled a hand on the back of Achilles' head. "But yes. I'd like that, too."

"Right, good. If you're not gonna fuck me, I'm sleeping. Didn't realize how tired I was 'til I got horizontal, but oh god. Sleeping. You... you stay here. Please?" That last request was quiet, like Achilles was present enough to know it was a strange thing to be demanding.

Pat only shifted a little, allowing Achilles' weight to settle over him more comfortably. "I had no intentions of moving."

— — —

*Pat was underground again, although this time he was underground and inside, in a bed that belonged to him, the bedroom door wide open.*

*"Shall we see what happens when our lover arrives and finds the two of us like this?" he asked. Zagreus was sprawled out beneath him, still mostly clothed, except for his leggings, which Patroclus had done away with almost immediately.*

*Patroclus' fashion sense was much more practical, so all he'd had to do was pull up his skirt.*

*"Hah, yes, let him see me."*

*No sooner than Zagreus made the request did the door open, and Patroclus' attention was drawn from the man he was buried inside, up to...*

*To Achilles.*

## 4. Chapter 4

### Summary for the Chapter:

Pat and Achilles get all wet, Achilles retains his swiftness in this life too, Hypnos has an announcement to make.

### Notes for the Chapter:

THE FUCKENING HAS ARRIVED!!!!

(welcome to the reason this has an explicit rating. it's not that exciting they barely do anything at all but it's sweet as hell.)

"Achilles and Patroclus are together." It was the first thing Thanatos said to Zagreus as he made his way out of the Styx, not even a 'hello' beforehand.

Zagreus was still scrubbing Styx water out of his hair when he responded with, "yes...?" Of course they were together. Zagreus had just seen them, while he was on the surface. Neither of them had seen him this time, which Thanatos would probably count as a success and Zagreus counted as yet another level of longing.

"Hypnos." Thanatos elbowed his brother, who'd fallen asleep in midair, and woke with an explosive series of nonsense words and almost dropped the list he'd been holding.

"Wha—oh! Hi! Yeah! I saw them at a party, they were all over each other."

"Wait, you mean they're *together*?" Zagreus dropped the used towel and came closer to the two of them, drawing them into a little circle together while the shades who'd already been waiting on Hypnos to awake and check them in continued to mill about. "Romantically?"

"Helllll yeah," Hypnos drawled, seeming to sag where he was floating around. "There was like. So much tongue. Maybe a little too much tongue. My point is, they were making out and then they went home together."

Zagreus shook his head, in case there was still a little Styx water in them. "That can't be, I just died up there. Chaos..." He deflated a little, leaning on Thanatos. "Do you think maybe they were just messing with me?"

Than shook his head. "Chaos generally keeps their word. Especially if they've claimed something will be as amusing as they seemed to think this whole business was."

"Well, duh." Hypnos rolled his eyes and then rolled his whole body, getting more comfortable in his blankets. "Didn't they say they had to love the same people in life that they loved in death? And they don't even know you yet, how would they love you?"

Zagreus and Thanatos looked at one another askance for a moment, finding themselves in the uncomfortable position of Hypnos having found a solution to their problem long before either of them ever uncovered it.

— — —

When Achilles woke, Pat was still underneath him.

This was something of a miracle, in his opinion.

Pat being in bed with him at all was a miracle, obviously, as the result of an epiphany the likes of which Achilles rarely had. He wasn't stupid, as he'd explained to a deeply dubious Pat, he just wasn't always the most self-aware person in the world. Pat had been dubious because Achilles had explained this upon the realization that Pat was not straight, after having been on several double-dates with his girlfriend and Pat's boyfriend. To be entirely fair, Achilles had not known these were double-dates, and also Pat and his boyfriend behaved about the same as Pat did with Achilles, which was less a product of Pat not being interested in men and more a product of Achilles being very interested in Pat, thinking back on it.

Achilles did, overall, feel a bit terrible, not because of anything he'd said or done with regards to Pat, although there was a minor amount of embarrassment for kissing him (doing more than just kissing him, actually) in front of the entire party. No, he felt mostly terrible because he hadn't

brushed his teeth. If there was one thing that was worse than punch that was titled 'the Blue Monster', it was how his mouth felt approximately twelve hours after drinking a few cups of it. He was never very susceptible to hangovers, and so he was physically fine, but the aftertaste was horrid.

When he tried to get up, he realized Pat was holding his waist too tightly for him to move. From what he could tell, Pat was still asleep, his head turned to the side so that his forehead was shoved against the back of the futon, which they'd not pulled out before falling asleep on.

Achilles pushed himself up on his hands, scraping his hair out of his face and pulling a wayward strand of it out of his mouth. Pat still had his glasses on, although they were crooked and digging into his nose, so Achilles eased them off, folding them and setting them on the ottoman that sat next to the futon.

He looked cute when he slept. His eyelashes were always so pretty, long like the way girls wanted theirs to be, but they looked even darker when his eyes were shut. Achilles ran his thumb down the bridge of Pat's nose, and then tapped the mole just to the side of it, an inch below his right tear duct. Pat often complained whenever he was congested that he couldn't sleep with his mouth open, but his lips did part a little, dry from his own breath pushing past them while he slept. His cheek was squashed from the way his face was digging into the back of the futon, his beard ruffled a little. Yeah. Cute.

Achilles tried once more to free himself, but Pat's grip on him only tightened, both arms going around him now. He was awake, or at least in the process of becoming so.

His eyes opened and he squinted at Achilles for a moment before pulling him closer, burying his face in Achilles' shoulder. He muttered something, but between his sleep-addled voice and his unwillingness to stop muffling himself against Achilles, it was impossible to hear.

"Good morning to you, too," Achilles said, making assumptions.



He was only wearing the T-shirt he'd had under the flannel he'd borrowed from Pat, and his jeans, which were immensely uncomfortable to sleep in but drunk Achilles had managed it. As Pat held him tighter, the shirt rode up, baring his lower back to the perils of the air conditioner.

Pat finally leaned his head back. "Asked what time it is," he said, only mildly more comprehensible.

"No idea." Achilles stretched, and Pat tipped his head back, his eyes going closed again. "Let me up, I need to brush my teeth."

"Ugh."

"You should, too." Achilles finally managed to escape Pat's grasp, and he made his way to the bathroom sink, leaving the door open so he could eye Pat, who was still lying on the couch.

"Ugh."

"You have to, actually, or I'm not gonna kiss you again."

"Mmmkay." Pat sat up, rubbing at his eyes. "Where's my glasses?"

"Turn around."

"Oh." He put them on, then glanced at the clock that sat on the dresser they used as a TV stand. The clock itself was supremely annoying because it was made to look like one of those melting Dali clocks so it hung over the side of the dresser which meant it had to be moved anytime they wanted to open the top drawer. It was also usually a few minutes off. But it looked cool. "Goddddamit, Achilles, it's only eight-thirty. I'm going back to sleep."

"Do what you want," Achilles said, through a mouthful of toothpaste. He rinsed it out before he spoke again. "But if you go back to sleep, I'm gonna jerk off in the shower instead of having my way with you."

"Don't do that." He stretched, and Achilles enjoyed watching him do it until the point at which Pat looked back at him, and then Achilles pretend he'd not been watching. "Have your way with me, please."

"Then brush your teeth," Achilles bargained. "I'm getting in the shower."

He didn't hesitate before stripping with the door still open, and found it felt immeasurably nice to be free of clothes messy from day-old sweat and a drink somebody had spilled on his pants. He'd never been awkward about undressing in front of Pat before, and he wasn't necessarily uncomfortable now, but he was curious if Pat was watching. Turning around to catch him at it would betray his own thoughts, though, so he slipped into the shower instead, pulling his hair up with the elastic he kept wrapped around his wrist.

Over the sound of the spray, he heard the sink come on. Pat actually had gotten up to brush his teeth instead of, as Achilles had assumed he would, lying around until Achilles got out of the shower and bothered him about it again. Achilles smirked to himself, fully enjoying the fact that he'd managed to drag Pat out of bed on thirst alone.

The sink turned off, but Pat didn't shut the door behind himself. This wasn't unusual—the ventilation in the bathroom was terrible and if they left the door shut while they showered, everything in the bathroom would get wet with the steam. Achilles only shut and locked it when he actually did plan on jerking off in the shower.

This meant that Achilles was caught marvelously unaware when Pat pulled open the shower curtain.

"Agh, what the fuck—" he said on reflex as Pat clambered into the shower stall with him, completely naked, crowding Achilles against the back wall.

The shower was barely big enough to fit one person, especially if that person was Pat-sized. It was not at all meant to permit two people, even if they were pressed together like this. The soap tray was jammed into Achilles' back, and after mere seconds of impassioned kissing (because what else was one to do when an attractive man who admittedly wanted to sleep with you invaded your shower) one of them had managed to elbow the shower caddy and send it and its contents sprawling across the wet floor.

Pat leaned back and clocked himself in the temple with the showerhead. "Ow. I'm going to be honest, I thought this would be sexier," he said.

And it *was* sexy. How could hot water and a hot man (who'd *definitely* started lifting again, god, Achilles could feel the power in his arms even when he wasn't flexing) not be sexy, even if a bottle of body wash had just crash-landed on Achilles' foot?

The steam had started sticking Pat's flyaway curls to his face, soft whorls of black that blended in with his sideburns and showed up starkly against his cheekbones. Achilles' attempt to keep his hair dry had all but failed, Pat's efforts having pushed him directly under the spray for a second. He didn't give a singular fuck about that, because Pat was, apparently, trying to have sex with him in the shower, and *Achilles needed that right now immediately*.

"It is. It's good. Keep going," he said.

Pat leaned in, ducking to the side not only to avoid the showerhead but to kiss Achilles' neck, the water softening the scratch of his beard. Achilles tipped his face up and to the side, aiming to get more room, and made the mistake of sticking his face directly into the spray, which had him spitting out water.

"Augh. Just. Turn that off."

"What's the point of having shower sex if you turn off the shower?" Pat asked him, which was an excellent question, really.

"Then just get out of the shower, this... isn't working. You're very hot, but —"

"I see your point," said Pat, who hadn't seemed like he was considering Achilles' thoughts at all, busy kissing his chest. He lifted his head, his nose wrinkling. "You taste like soap."

"Yes, well, someone didn't give me a chance to rinse off before he jumped me," Achilles said. "Hop out and give me a second."

"Fine." Pat gave him one more kiss, as if he couldn't quite resist another.

This, also, tasted like soap.

Achilles resolved himself to finish washing up as quickly as possible, gathering scattered toiletries from off the floor, which only served to further soak his hair. He pulled it out of the bun before it became so tangled he'd have to cut the hair tie to get it out, and scraped it out of his face, finally finishing his shower.

"Hurry up," said Pat, who'd not actually left the bathroom. Achilles could see him in little flashes between the shower curtain. He was toweling off, but most of those flashes were of bare skin.

"I am hurrying." He was not. He was staring at Pat's ass.

Pat's hand reached into the shower again, flipping the knob so that the temperature went freezing cold.

"Fuck! Stop!" Achilles jammed it all the way to the left, stopping the stream. "What are you trying to do, freeze me to death!?"

"I was trying to turn it off, actually," Pat said. "Don't pout at me like that, Achilles, obviously I wasn't trying to freeze you. Giving you a cold shower right before trying to fuck you would be immensely counterintuitive."

"You're lucky you're pretty," Achilles said, squeezing the excess water out of his hair. "Give me a towel, please."

Pat did, and as Achilles dried himself off, Pat watched. It wasn't the sort of watching Achilles had been doing while Pat stretched, subtle glances that were cut off as soon as he might be caught looking. Pat *stared*, openly appreciative, standing with his hip leaned against the vanity. It was a look full of heat, the sort of thing that made Achilles almost embarrassed, wanting to hide behind the towel.

Nobody he'd been with had ever just *looked* at him like that, open and straightforward, not hiding a single thing on his mind. Pat shifted his weight

where he stood. His hand was on his cock, just teasing himself, not enough pressure to do anything much, which meant he was getting hard from the sight of Achilles.

"Are you alright?" he asked, probably because Achilles had frozen in place, still holding the towel even though he'd mostly forgotten about it.

"I'm... yes. It's just, the way you're looking at me."

"There's nothing stopping me anymore," he said by way of explanation.

*I've wanted you for years*, Pat had said, last night.

And there was nothing stopping Achilles anymore, either. Nothing keeping him from satisfying that strange, squirming feeling in his chest whenever he saw Pat with some other guy, the jealous need to have Pat for himself.

So Achilles kissed him. And Achilles threw all of himself at Pat, who caught him, staggering a little and leaning more fully against the vanity, his hand reaching out to catch yet another thing that Achilles would have knocked over in their passion.

"You could have let that fall over," he said, when he saw what it was, that shitty vase Achilles made in tenth grade ceramics which didn't really look like a vase at all but was instead hilariously phallic, and was now used to hold Pat's toothbrush, because he'd thought it was so goddamn funny he insisted on Achilles letting him keep it.

"Absolutely not," Pat said, "my boyfriend made me that."

"No, *I* made that—oh." Achilles halted when he realized Pat wasn't talking about the guy who took him to the junior prom even though he was a sophomore—he was talking about his *current* boyfriend. Which, he'd apparently decided, was Achilles. "You actually want to...?"

"I know you think I'm some sort of slut because I made the mistake of telling you that I've had sex more than once in our room, but I don't normally do this with people who aren't my boyfriend," Pat said.

“Oh, shut up,” said Achilles.

“But yes, I want to date you,” Pat clarified. Possibly unnecessarily, but Achilles liked hearing it so much he’d never claim that for a second. “Something tells me that’s what you want, too.”

“Yeah.” He couldn’t pretend irritation with Pat any longer, couldn’t keep the smile off his face. Pat’s hand on his hip was warm, and leaning against him wasn’t just sexy, it was also comforting, like he belonged there. Like there was no doubt that Pat wanted him there.

When they kissed again, Achilles started to believe he belonged here, too.

Well, not 'here' specifically. "I really don't want our first time to be up against the bathroom sink," Achilles said, already fearing the moment their suitemate would start knocking on the adjoining door.

"Good thing I folded down the futon, then," Pat said. "C'mon. Let me at you."

He'd argue that he'd already let Pat at him, a couple of times, but there was a time for arguing and there was a time for letting Pat tackle him to the mattress, and this was the latter.

Being pressed beneath his weight was deliciously comfortable, and Achilles wrapped his arm around Pat's neck as they kissed, opening his mouth to deeper and deeper passes of Pat's tongue, until he was virtually fucking Achilles' mouth. Achilles' head spun. Was this a predictor of what Pat was intending to do to him, or was this what Pat wanted from Achilles? He'd have him either way. He'd have him however Pat wanted.

As they were already naked, it was easy to feel Pat's cock against his hip, easy to re-angle himself to press them together. The friction against him forced a noise into the kiss—he wasn't sure which of them it was. Probably him. God, he wanted, he *wanted*, and Pat would give him what he wanted.

He pulled out of the kiss, rolling his hips in a particularly dirty grind. He was grinning, stroking Achilles' cheek. "God, you look good like that. You

flush so prettily, my Achilles."

*My Achilles.* His. It was all Achilles wanted to be, forever.

He tipped his head back and planted his foot so he could get some leverage to grind up, a little too dry, but Pat had planned a little, it seemed, stretching forward just a second to grab a little bottle.

Achilles could have been more helpful with the lube, but he was busy figuring out what the texture of Pat's beard felt like under his lips, kissing over his jaw and then down his neck. Eventually, Pat got a hand between their bodies, slick and wonderful around Achilles' cock for just a second and then *both of them*, stroking them at a measured pace, practiced turns of his wrist.

Was this how he touched himself?

Did he do it in his bed just above Achilles?

Did he sometimes look over the side, catching sight of Achilles sprawled out on the bunk beneath him?

His questions went unanswered, mostly because he couldn't ask them. He could barely get out more than "*ah, ah, Pat!*" before digging his hands into Pat's shoulders and going rigid as he came, between the two of them, on Pat's hand, on Pat's cock, *fuck*.

Pat was giving him a bemused look when he finally peeled his eyes open and unburied his face from Pat's shoulder. "Achilles," he said. God, his voice sounded good like that. Achilles never wanted to hear his name again, unless it was Pat sighing it like that.

"Yeah." Achilles kissed him, but Pat pulled away before it could deepen.

"Achilles. I must ask, do you... normally come that fast?" he teased, grinning like the absolute little shit he was.

Achilles shoved at his chest. He was hopelessly attracted to Pat. Even this was cute. "It wasn't that fast."

"It was less than five minutes!"

Achilles had no way to dispute this, because it felt like forever, and it also felt like seconds. Just to be contrary, he said, "it was definitely more than five minutes."

"'Fastest man at state finals' was supposed to just apply to your performance on the track," Pat said. He wasn't truly irritated with Achilles' *performance*, Achilles thought, otherwise he wouldn't still be rubbing off against Achilles' hip. "It's alright, love, we'll work on it."

He liked the sound of that. "Let me get you off," he said, which wasn't exactly the *best* dirty talk, but it was all his orgasm-addled mind could handle. He already felt sort of sleepy. He knew Pat certainly wasn't going to be opposed to a nap after this.

"Yeah, Achilles, please." Pat shifted to the side, gave Achilles more room to work, and he stroked Pat with the express intention of getting him off with similarly embarrassing haste.

Pat had stamina in spades, apparently. He kissed Achilles while Achilles got him off, making soft little hums into his mouth. When he got close, he grasped Achilles' wrist, forcing him still, and fucked into his hand.

Achilles revised his previous opinion on Pat sighing his name.

Pat moaning his name through an orgasm was Achilles' preferred way of hearing it.

"What if I don't come too fast," Achilles said, while the two of them cleaned up after, "what if you last strangely long?"

"Please don't kid yourself." He said it with a kiss to Achilles' temple, no malice, no heat. "It's okay, Achilles. Actually, I can't wait to edge you until you cry."

Achilles had no doubt he could do that.

"I doubt you can do that."



Pat raised his eyebrows in a way that said he knew this was a lie, but said nothing, instructing Achilles to be the big spoon, instead.

— — —

That night, Achilles agreed to join Pat on another stakeout to search for the Blood Man. The results re: Blood Man sightings were about as positive as they'd been the previous time they'd done this. If not for the glowing golden leaf Achilles had found, Pat would have thought the Blood Man simply disliked Achilles.

The results re: Achilles being annoyed at him for dragging him out past his bedtime were... less terrible. Achilles wasn't so concerned about being up late, since his classes on Mondays didn't start until ten. He seemed relatively content to sit beside Pat on a bench that had a decent view of the library's basement door, stealing glances at him when he thought Pat wasn't looking.

"You know, you don't have to do that," he said. In response to Achilles' questioning noise, he clarified. "You don't have to look away when I catch you staring."

"I... oh. Yeah, I guess not." He leaned against Pat's side, pushing his head insistently against Pat's shoulder like a cat begging for attention. Pat put an arm around him, keeping his eyes on his camera (not *his* camera, really, he'd borrowed a fancy one from the photography department). "I don't think I'm used to confronting my attraction to you, yet. I still feel like I shouldn't feel this way. I mean, when I think about it, obviously, that's wrong. But I keep trying to stop myself from looking." He gave an irritated little huff. "It doesn't make sense."

"You rarely make any sense," Pat noted.

"Let me be a contradiction for a while longer." Achilles tilted his head so that his nose, chilled from the fall air, nudged against the underside of Pat's jaw. "I've only confronted my attraction for you yesterday."

Pat supposed he'd had a lot more extensive of a crush than Achilles. "About that. Did somebody dare you last night to kiss me, specifically? Whoever it is, I feel I ought to thank them."

"No. They only told me to kiss the most attractive person in the room." As Achilles spoke, his breath warmed Pat's skin. "That's you, that's always you, ever since you got all..." he made a vague gesture with his hand which probably referred to the point at which Pat had hit a growth spurt, gained the ability to grow a beard, and learned he was quite good at weight-lifting, all in one year. That wasn't very recent. He'd been, what, seventeen? Eighteen? Senior year of high school.

"Do you think, perhaps, you might've been attracted to me since longer than yesterday?" he ventured.

Achilles sighed. This was also warm. "You told me yesterday you'd been interested in me for years," he said. "I think I would have been interested in you for years, too, if I'd let myself."

"If you let yourself?"

"Maybe that's not the way to put it. The point is, I probably had feelings for you, deep down, but I did my best to ignore them. And I think I still have this reflexive urge to try to ignore them."

"So, say you stop ignoring them," Pat suggested. "Right now. What happens?"

Achilles lifted his head from Pat's shoulder. "This happens."

He very thoroughly distracted Pat from his stakeout with a kiss.

## 5. Chapter 5

### Summary for the Chapter:

Zagreus sets up a meeting, Pat is delighted, and Achilles handles all of this extremely well (just kidding, he's a disaster).

### Notes for the Chapter:

We have reached THE ANGST CHAPTER. I'm sorry. On a positive note this is now 7 chapters long for more PZA.

Something was wrong with Zagreus.

Thanatos could tell this simply enough from the death records, once he weeded through the highly unnecessary commentary Hypnos had begun adding in recent years. (One of Zag's had 'REKT' written next to it and Thanatos had no earthly idea what that meant.) Zag's deaths these days were usually natural causes, over and over. But his most recent few were off—Minotaur, satyr poison, Lernean Bone Hydra, even a 'redacted,' although Thanatos had no idea why they bothered redacting that anymore.

It either meant Zagreus was getting sloppy (which was unlikely) or unnecessarily upping the Pact of Punishment (which was much more probable). Zagreus had a tendency to make things harder on himself, usually when he was upset about something. As Thanatos recalled, he'd started doing it just after Achilles and Patroclus elected to reincarnate. The two of them had been able to talk him down from his mildly self-destructive way of coping with careful explanations of why they made that choice and their pact with Chaos, but this time, Thanatos supposed it fell to him.

There were several ways to ensure that he'd catch Zagreus, but waiting in his room was probably the simplest, given that finding him in the Underworld was tedious, and he couldn't guarantee Zag would use Mort. Also, having important conversations over a fight with a few dozen wretches was maybe not the best idea.

Thanatos had prepared himself to wait as long as it took for Zag, and was startled to find him already in his room.

He was lying on his bed, an even stranger sight, and he was holding something in his hands. When Thanatos drew closer, close enough that Zagreus noticed his presence and turned his head to look at him, he realized it was a Chthonic Companion, not Mort or Battie, but one he'd gotten from somebody else. It looked, like all of them, cute and soft with silly eyes and a cheerful face. It was a direct counterpart to how miserable Zagreus appeared.

"What's wrong?" Thanatos asked, willing his armor away before taking a seat on the bed beside Zagreus.

Zag pulled the plush toy in closer to his chest, folding his arms around it. A few orange legs poked out of his grasp—it was designed to look like some sort of insect. "I can't... it's Achilles and Patroclus. Pat. He's just called Pat, this time around, right? Have you spoken to them recently?"

"Not much," Thanatos said. Pat had mentioned to him that he was seeing Achilles, that he hoped Thanatos would understand. Thanatos, of course, was completely fine with this. After that, he only texted Thanatos to discuss his project, the documentary about Zagreus, and Thanatos could really only give him vague answers.

"I saw them a few nights ago. Maybe more than a few. I haven't gotten up there, couldn't check the time." He let Thanatos come closer, let him settle a hand atop his knee. "They're really happy together, it seems like. And that's good! I'm so glad. It's just... there's no place for me there, anymore. And I'll be okay with that, eventually, but for now, it sort of hurts."

He released his grip on the Companion he held, and Thanatos finally placed it. He couldn't remember what it was called, but it was the one Achilles had given him. Thanatos put his hand on the little creature's head, running his fingers over the fabric. As gently as he could, he said, "Zagreus. You're wrong."

It was perhaps not as gentle as it should have been. Zagreus gave him a wounded look, his brows drawn together. "Than, they're mortals. They need to live a normal, mortal life. Anything I'd do would just interfere, I mean, isn't that the reason they died the first time? Gods getting in the way?"

"You're not going to *kill them*, Zag," Thanatos said, trying not to scoff. "What you're doing is vastly different from what happened in Troy. I know you weren't around to witness all that, but I was. There is such thing as gods toying with mortal existence, which your uncles did all too often those days, and there is what you're doing. All you've ever done is love them."

He wondered where Zagreus had come up with what he said. It sounded like a line that had been told to him by somebody else. Thinking on it, Thanatos could almost certainly place it as advice from Nyx.

"And how am I to know whether they'd love me in return? You said it yourself, Thanatos. They're not the Achilles and Patroclus I remember." Self-doubt really never looked good on him.

"I don't know that," Thanatos admitted. "All I know is that Pat is still looking for you. He's put in enough work looking for you that he even learned your name somehow. You and I both know he wouldn't do that for someone he doesn't care about."

"I think I just ought to let them be," Zagreus said. "At least for a while."

Thanatos truly had to disagree. "I don't think you should do anything of the sort. But if you want to... what am I saying, of course you'll do whatever you wish."

"Than, would you please just—" Zagreus cut himself off, making an aggravated noise in his throat. He squeezed the Companion close again.

"Please just what?" Thanatos asked. Just leave? Just let him be? Just drop the issue?

"Just *hold me*."

Ever since they'd begun what was now (to Aphrodite's delight) one of the longest-running relationships between two gods, Zagreus had never asked for affection. He'd asked Thanatos if he was permitted to *give* affection, especially right at the beginning. *Can I touch you here? Can I kiss you now? Can I take this off?* Once they'd become more used to being physically intimate with one another, Zagreus had tapered off asking him, simply reaching for him instead, or letting Thanatos reach for him in turn.

He was never like this, curled-up and prickly, looking for all the world like he didn't want to be anywhere near anybody, and yet pleading to be held.

Of course Thanatos wasn't going to ignore such a request.

He stretched out on the bed beside Zagreus, urging him to turn onto his side so that Thanatos could wrap his arms around him from behind, leaving Zagreus to curl around the Companion Achilles had given him. It reminded Thanatos of how he used to cuddle with Mort squeezed in his arms and Hypnos behind him, wrapped around him like a clinging vine, forcing Thanatos to take a moment's rest.

"I'm sorry," Thanatos said, not quite sure why.

"Not your fault," Zagreus muttered. He sounded listless, which was somehow worse than it would have been if he was upset enough to cry. Instead, he was so upset it seemed he *couldn't* cry.

"I love you."

"I know. I love you too." This was a little bit brighter, but still leagues behind how Zag normally was.

"I miss them too," Thanatos said, not for the first time. His throat felt tight around the words.

Zag's only response was a little sob, the kind that made Thanatos hold him closer.

— — —

*Pat was sitting inside of a little house that his waking self had never seen, but that his dreaming self knew belonged to him. He was amidst a pile of cushions that was truly ridiculous in volume, pleasantly weighed down by a warm body on top of his. His head was tucked against another person's shoulder.*

*He opened his eyes to meet Zagreus'.*

*His dear stranger (and wasn't that an odd way to think of a person) had his arms folded up on top of Pat's chest, his cheek leaning on them, watching him sleep in a way that might have been a little off-putting if Pat didn't feel so affectionately toward him.*

*"What are you up to?" Pat asked him.*

*"Thinking," Zagreus said.*

*"A dangerous pastime."*

*There was movement behind him, and another voice joined in. "You're not trying to head out on us, are you, lad?" He recognized the voice. It was Achilles.*

*"Oh, no, I'd never."*

*Pat tipped his head back and watched Achilles lean in to kiss Zagreus. This was not accompanied with the flare of jealousy Pat expected from watching his boyfriend kiss somebody else. Instead, he felt warm all the way through, and his hands tightened around Zagreus' waist. He was almost disappointed when they parted, as if he wanted to watch them longer.*

*Zagreus was smiling when Achilles leaned back. And then he changed the angle of his head so that he could kiss Pat instead.*

*Warm, all of him was warm, but especially his tongue. He smiled even wider as Pat lazily broke it off, placing kisses on his jaw instead.*

*Zagreus' hands tightened in Pat's shirt. "I... I really love you two," he said. Where Pat kissed his neck, he could feel his pulse racing. This was the first*

*time he'd admitted such a thing. Pat wasn't sure how he knew that.*

*"You know we feel the same," Pat said.*

*"We adore you, Zagreus," Achilles added.*

*Zagreus wiggled where he was planted on top of Pat, his giddiness having transformed into excess energy. He was like a dog that wagged its tail excessively before jumping onto you. "That's good, then," he said, the laurels on his head flaring bright with his joy.*

— — —

When Achilles got back to the room after class, Pat looked like he was just messing around on his phone, but he had his Research Face on, which was worrisome, these days.

"Still nothing?" Achilles set his backpack by the front door, joining Pat on the couch, determining that yes, he absolutely was on the 'Overheard at GFU' page, probably looking for cryptid mentions. Definitely looking for cryptid mentions.

"Nothing," he confirmed. "It's been like this for almost a month, now."

And with finals drawing inevitably near and Pat's documentary project due, a month's worth of no Blood Man was not good. "Maybe he hibernates," Achilles suggested, trying to pitch it like a joke. "Maybe it's too cold out for him. He's partially on-fire, maybe all the rain and snow has been keeping him inside whatever cave he lives in."

Pat gave a non-answer of a hum. "Nobody's seen him since you last did," he said. "Or, well, if they have seen him, they haven't mentioned it, which seems ridiculous. Everybody talks about the Blood Man when he shows up."

"So it seems." Achilles fit himself in between Pat's legs, laying with his head on Pat's chest, which was becoming his new favorite pillow. "I've, um. Still been having dreams about him." In his most recent, the Blood Man—



Zagreus, they were fairly certain that was his actual name—had told Achilles that he loved him. Had told Achilles *and* Pat that he loved them both, actually. "Him and you, really."

"Me too." Pat sighed, his hand sorting through Achilles' hair so he could touch the back of his neck. "They get more and more emotional, like there's some real feeling... it's some strange subconscious dream thing. Probably."

"Yeah. That damn subconscious." It felt like more than that, though. He'd woken from his latest dream suffused with the overwhelming feeling of adoration, of a deep, almost overwhelming love that filled his entire being. It was as pleasant as it was confusing, waking up feeling entirely in love with another man while his boyfriend slept beside him, both of them having taken to sharing the futon instead of using either of their actual beds.

Not that he didn't also feel that way about Pat, except, *did he?* In his waking hours he still felt a little awkward about his relationship with Pat sometimes, getting used to having a boyfriend he also lived with, and the strange transition between being best friends and dating his best friend. There was the 'we got dinner together, but is that a date or is that just what we do every Tuesday?' thing and the 'I still sometimes have the urge to fist-bump you instead of giving you a kiss on the cheek' thing and the 'will our friends think that the two of us giving each other piggyback rides all the time is some sort of weird PDA thing even though we did it before we were together?' thing. It gave him anxiety headaches.

His relationship with Pat, in the context of his dreams, was much less confusing. He knew how he felt about him, didn't have to think his way through the 'how should I touch him in this moment' mental gymnastics he so often did. Maybe it was a manifestation of his desires, that kissing pat would be as easy as breathing.

"Say the Blood Man, Zagreus, whoever he is, really is a god," Pat suggested. "Would that give him the power to manipulate dreams?"

"I think if he's God, he can do whatever he wants," Achilles said.

"Nothing's suggesting he's God, singular." Pat's hand left Achilles' hair so that he could type something. "All the sources I can find say he's *a* god, as in one of many. But I can't find anything about Zagreus and dreams. He'd have to be like, the god of... huh."

"What?" Achilles asked, lifting his head.

"Nothing, it's just... do you remember that guy, Hypnos, he's Than's brother, kind of a stoner?"

Achilles puzzled over the name for a moment, Pat was always so much better with names than him. He finally dredged it out of his memory—a tall, lanky guy with a mop of curly platinum hair and eyes that always looked tired and a little like he was on something. "What about him?"

"He told me once that he was the god of sleep." Pat turned his phone around, holding it so Achilles could see the screen. "I thought he was joking, or high, or both, but..."

The name matched, at least. "Huh. Have you spoken to him, recently?"

"No," Pat said, "but I intend to."

— — —

"I'm sure you're wondering why I've gathered you all here today," said Hypnos grandly, as if he was speaking to a stadium of people instead of addressing Thanatos and Zagreus over a table at the lounge. He was in rare form today, Zagreus noted. There was something more gleeful than usual in his eye, and from Hypnos, such an expression reminded you he was a grandchild of Chaos.

"Is there any sense in asking you to just get on with it?" Thanatos ventured.

"Nope!"

"Great." Than sat back, folding his arms as he waited for Hypnos to continue.

"I have received communication from somebody veeery special," Hypnos said, which could mean literally anything from 'talked to Charon' to 'message from Zeus'. "As it turns out, the realm of dreams—always a fascinating place in my humble opinion—has gotten more interesting than usual lately!"

"Hypnos, for the love of the gods." Thanatos looked like he was going to kill him.

Zagreus tried to cover up his snickering, and was not altogether successful.

"And because of some fascinating things happening in dreams, I have been contacted by none other than Pat whatever-his-last-name-is, regarding an individual named—pause for effect—"

"*Hypnos*." Than really wasn't abiding by any dramatic pauses.

"—Zagreus!" Hypnos announced, giving a grand sweeping gesture with his hands which almost knocked over the bottle of nectar they were splitting.

"We know they figured out my name somehow," Zagreus said. He was assuming it had something to do with the fact that Orpheus had managed to tell a few yet-living mortals about him, and while there was an absolute minimum of information about him on the surface, compared to, say, his father, there were mortals who would know his name.

"Yes, but did you know they keep having dreams about you?" Hypnos continued, his grin becoming more of a leer as he eagerly awaited some sort of reaction from Zagreus. He got what he wanted, Zagreus was staring open-mouthed. "Like, repeatedly. Every night. And, so, I may have split a joint with the guy and he may be a little bit of a rambler and he maaaaay have told me that said dreams are *extremely* sexy and, more importantly, if what I remember about your love life is correct—which it is, I never forget that kinda thing—they're not actually dreams. They're memories. They remember you."

"They *what*?"

"Mm-hm!" Hypnos nodded, his hair bouncing, his sleep mask almost sliding down his forehead. "Him and Achilles both. He was all, 'we keep having the same dreams, which I've never heard of before, and it doesn't seem like a normal thing that just happens when you're dating somebody,' yadda yadda." He tried (and failed, mostly) to affect Patroclus' accent while he was quoting.

"But that means—!" Zagreus cut himself off because he didn't really know what it meant. It meant a lot of things. It meant they cared enough about him to seek out Hypnos and ask him. It meant they still thought about him. It meant...

It meant he had a chance.

"What did you tell him?" asked Thanatos, who still had the presence of mind to bring up the important questions.

"Nothing specific. Just 'dreams have meanings,' and also, 'is he hot?' The answer to that one was yes, by the way."

Zagreus laughed, sharp because he hadn't expected to. "Oh, gods. Blood and darkness—what am I supposed to *do*?"

He looked to Thanatos, because of course he did. Than was smiling at him, not a rare sight nowadays, but it was even sweeter than usual. He nudged Zagreus' foot below the table. "Zag. I don't know what Mother Nyx has told you about not interfering with mortals, all that. But... Given that they already know you exist, I think it wouldn't hurt to talk to them."

Zag nodded, turning over about a dozen ideas in his mind at once. He only knew one thing for sure:

"We're gonna have to plan this out, aren't we?"

— — —

"I don't know any specifics, okay?" Pat told Achilles, who'd just asked him for like the third time why Than asked him to meet him at the library in one

of the basement study rooms. "He just said it was related to my project, so I'm guessing it's a Blood Man thing."

Achilles followed him down the stairwell into the basement of the library, his backpack thrown over one shoulder. "I mean, he might also just still be into you and want to make out with you in a basement study room."

Pat shouldered open the door, which was technically supposed to be a fire exit, but was usually open. The study rooms upstairs had either glass walls or office-like cubicle walls between them, but down here, they were actual rooms, with actual doors. Pat would bet good money that they were typically used for what Achilles was insinuating.

"I told Than I have a boyfriend," he said, hurrying toward the study rooms. They were late, because Achilles had missed Pat over Thanksgiving break (never mind the fact that they saw each other twice) and had insisted on climbing into his lap and kissing him until the last possible minute. "I told him that like a month ago, when we got together."

"You know it's been exactly a month, as of yesterday?"

"See, that depends on whether you started kissing me before or after midnight," Pat argued. "I think it was after. So that means it's today."

"Happy anniversary then."

"'Anniversary' implies a year, so it's not, actually." He checked his phone again, looking for the specific room number. B04. Right.

"I'd say we should go on a date, but I have to study," Achilles complained. That had been a running issue since they'd first gotten together. Finals week put a huge damper on any sort of relationship, much less one so new. Pat barely had the time to think about anything that wasn't school-related, and he definitely didn't have the time to go out with Achilles.

Honestly, it was a miracle Achilles agreed to come with him here. It was probably only immense curiosity that urged him along—or worry that Than's message meant something about making out with Pat.

"We can go on a date after winter break starts," Pat said.

He turned the handle and opened the door to room B04. Than was not inside.

Instead, there was a man seated on top of the long study table, a few of the chairs tugged out of the way so that his feet could swing freely.

His feet, Pat noticed, were on fire.

So was his hair. Rather, the leaves that were in his hair. His hair itself seemed relatively unsinged.

Pat had never seen him so close. Not while awake, that is. He had a youthful face, and looked to be about the same age as Pat and Achilles, with an upturned nose and a curl of a smile on his mouth. His eyes were mismatched, one a normal if striking green, the other entirely black except for a ring of red. He was not dressed the way he'd been when Pat had seen him, but in a plain T-shirt and shorts, unseasonably warm but ordinary all the same. This only made his burning feet and the sparking leaves sprouting from his head look even stranger by comparison.

Achilles pulled the door shut a little too hard behind them, his eyes wide and trained on the Blood Man. "Oh my god, you're *here*," Achilles said in a hush.

"Hi." He gave them a bright smile. "I... wanted to formally introduce myself."

A thousand questions ran through Pat's brain. *Who are you? What are you? Can I film this conversation?* He was struck dumb by the Blood Man's sudden appearance, however, and asked none of these things.

All he said was, "Zagreus?"

His face was a wide-eyed picture of shock for a moment before melting into another smile. "Yeah, that's my name." His voice was heartachingly soft. "It's good to hear it from you, Pat."

Zagreus seemed to understand how the two of them knew his name prior to this meeting, which was still beyond Pat, other than 'weird dreams'. The first ludicrous thought to pop through his brain was *now the cryptid is hunting you*. Achilles put his hand on Pat's shoulder, gripping tight, as if to keep him in place.

"Explain what's going on," Achilles said, wariness evident in his tone.

"It's going to sound a little... strange," Zagreus warned them. "Maybe a lot strange. Would the two of you like to sit down?"

Pat was prepared to pull up a chair and listen to the whole strange story, but Achilles' grip on his shoulder stayed firm, and he replied with a curt, "no, thanks."

"That's fine." Zagreus continued swinging his feet. Sparks fell from them, but didn't manage to light the carpet on fire somehow. "So, um, how much do you know about the gods?"

"More every day, it seems," Pat said, although he hadn't had much opportunity for research and his conversation with Hypnos had been more confusing than anything. "But not much overall."

Zagreus nodded. "Most people don't, these days. Fine by me, although I hear my uncle's furious about it. Anyway, there are the Olympians, right, up on the mountain and all." From the tone of his explanation, Pat guessed they were just supposed to take all this as actual fact rather than the myth he'd always assumed it was. "But there's also such a thing as Chthonic gods, the gods of the Underworld—and I'm one of those."

This had Achilles taking a jerky step backward.

Zagreus held up his hands as if in surrender. "It's not bad! Or evil! I promise. We just tend to deal more with people post... living."

"Dead people," Achilles corrected him.

"Well, yeah, but you don't have to say that like it's a bad thing. Some of my best friends are dead people!" He cracked a smile with that, and Pat swore his teeth were longer and sharper than they should be. The smile faded quickly, so he couldn't tell for certain. "I don't know how to... hm. Okay, so those dreams you've been apparently having?"

Achilles and Pat looked at one another, and Pat was sure Achilles was thinking the same thing he was. They had become more accustomed to sharing their dreams with one another in the past month, and often had the same ones on the same nights. They almost always featured Zagreus.

"So, they're not just dreams. They're memories. Of when you were dead."

"I think I'd recall dying," Achilles said.

Zagreus shook his head. "Most people don't remember past lives. And even among those who say they do, I'm sure ninety percent of them are making it up." He sighed. "Maybe this was a bad idea."

"No!" Pat cut him off before he could leave without telling them the rest. "No, sorry. I just. Keep going. I want to hear it. We'll be quiet."

Zagreus took a deep breath before continuing. It was a good thing he did, because he needed all the air in his lungs to say, "well, the two of you died sometime, like I dunno, three thousand years ago maybe, it was a war—can't remember which—and I knew Achilles for a while and then Pat for a shorter while and well, you two were together while you were alive, but then all three of us—yeah. And you asked me to make sure you fell in love in the next life, too," in one. He looked between the two of them after, waiting on any hint of disapproval or panic. "And I guess you did?"

Pat said, "I don't know about—" over top of Achilles saying, "wait, *what?*" and Zagreus only cringed.

"I'm glad I seem to have succeeded somehow?"

Achilles' hand slipped from Pat's shoulder and he crossed his arms instead. "No, no, no. *What?* Are you trying to tell me him and I are together—" he



gestured between himself and Pat, "—because a *god* said so?" There was a shake in his voice, as if from barely contained rage.

"No! *You* said so," Zagreus protested.

"Alright, but that wasn't me." Achilles took a step back, toward the door. "Or at least, that wasn't the same version of me."

Pat came up lacking for something to say once again. He'd accepted a long time ago that he would never completely understand Achilles' rationale, but he knew this much: Achilles was a creature of extremes. He felt things passionately—happiness turned into exuberance, attraction into lust, and frustration into fury. The latter was Pat's concern at the moment.

"I mean, Pat—" Achilles continued, "—would you honestly be okay knowing that some kind of crazy divine force was what drew us together, and not, I don't know, *human emotion*?"

His words made Pat's heart feel cold. "What makes you say it isn't?" he asked. "Do you... would you not be interested in me without all this?"

Achilles made a noise of frustration like a little growl. "I don't know. How could I know?"

Zagreus got off the table. Pat noted, distantly, that his feet didn't burn the carpet, and that he was very short. "I didn't mean to upset you two, I should just... I'll just go."

"No. I'll go," Achilles said, already turning the doorknob.

"Wait, where?" Pat turned to follow after him.

"Nowhere! A run. And then my dad's, I think. Just... let me think, okay?"

And what the hell could he say to that, other than, "okay." Even if he'd wanted to say something more extensive, Achilles was gone.

"Shit." Zagreus sank into the nearest chair, folding his hand one over the other on the back of it and laying his forehead on top of them. "I'm so sorry,

I didn't think he'd react that way, I... gods. Really should have gone about that better."

Pat rubbed at his brow. "He's not the type to take this easily. He... I can't say whether he'll come around. He might." He also might not, and Pat wasn't entirely prepared to deal with that possibility. He shelved it for the moment. "Do you, um. Maybe want to talk some more about all this?"

Zagreus lifted his head, with a little bit of a smile, although his eyes still looked sad. "I'd love to talk," he agreed.

"Back to mine, then," Pat said with a nod. He'd rather like to lie down. "Unless you want to stay in the library basement."

"As much as I enjoy the ambiance," Zagreus said, with an air that could have been a joke if his voice wasn't so weak, "let's go."

— — —

Achilles ran. Running usually cleared his head; all he had to focus on was the sharp late-autumn air piercing his lungs and the repetitive motion of his feet on the sidewalk as he followed the paths that snaked around campus. He carefully avoided any that led between the library and the dorm building he shared with Pat.

He was about to leave campus and continue on into the nearby neighborhoods when someone stopped him, standing in the middle of the walkway instead of darting to the side to allow Achilles to pass. He stopped, scrubbing his forearm over his eyes, which had gone red and raw from the cold and the wind and definitely not any emotion Achilles was desperately trying to tamp down on.

"Achilles?"

Oh, great. Just wonderful, actually.

Than was standing in front of him, pulling his hood off his head and letting all that silver hair shine in the Christmas lights that had been strung

between lampposts to keep campus looking festive. Once again, although it was the middle of the night, he was wearing those god-awful tinted glasses that Pat had once said were cute.

"I don't have time to talk," Achilles said.

"You look upset." He could see Than visibly cringe after saying that, as if he wished he hadn't brought it up.

"Yes, well, finals are next week, I think everyone's upset." As good an excuse as any.

"You saw Zagreus."

In all his rampant emotion and frustration, Achilles had forgotten: they were here because Than had asked Pat to meet with him. "What did you have to do with that?" he asked.

"Do you actually want to know?"

Did he?

Would it have been easier if he'd gone on dating Pat with no idea of anything supernatural affecting their relationship? If he'd assumed the only outside force pushing them together had been a game of truth or dare?

Of course it would have. But now that he knew a little, he wanted the whole story.

"Yes. Tell me everything."

"Then come with me," Than said, turning and not waiting for him to follow. "It's freezing out here."

Achilles couldn't say where he'd expected Than to take him, but it wasn't this. He'd led Achilles to the school's athletic center, which was closed for the evening. Not for long, though—one second, Than was standing in front of Achilles, and the next he'd vanished and reappeared inside the building, pushing the door open.

"How... did you do that?" Achilles asked, his brain already trying to reconcile the impossible. "Dammit, you're something supernatural too, aren't you?"

"Yeah," was all Than said, as he walked through the lobby and down the hallway in the dark, heading down the stairs to an area of the gym Achilles was unfamiliar with, having spent most of his time here on the running track that looped around the basketball court. Than didn't turn any lights on, but once they entered whatever room Than was taking him to in order to talk—or murder him, maybe—Achilles flicked on the overhead fluorescents.

They were in front of a boxing ring, and Thanatos was pulling off his hoodie, settling it on a bench nearby. He was surprisingly built beneath it, wearing a plain black tank top over athletic leggings, also black, with a purple stripe down the side. "You box, don't you?"

Not for some time, but he'd done it in high school, as a suggested way of relieving his temper. 'Anger management' had been Pat's way of putting it, but his counselor seemed to find that term outdated. "And how did you know that?" he asked. "Some sort of magical insight into my past lives?"

"No. Pat mentioned it." Than plucked his ever-present glasses off his face. Without them, his eyes weren't the plain grey Achilles had assumed, but a bright, unnatural gold.

Alright, so, maybe he understood the reason for the stupid glasses now.

"We don't have to, but you seem like you have a lot of extra energy. I thought this might help."

"I don't have gloves," Achilles said. He did have gloves, actually, but they were back at his room, a place he very much did not want to be if only for the high chance that Pat would be there.

"Is that a problem?"

"No." Achilles stripped off his own jacket and left it lying next to Than's, then hopped over the ropes.

His hands might smart after this, but if it was between that and complete numbness, Achilles would put up with the ache.

Than held up his hands so Achilles could target his palms, and gave him a few moments to get into a rhythm before asking, "so what the hell did Zag do?"

Achilles took a moment to steady himself, get back into form, before responding. His shoulders had seized up when he thought about everything again. "You're involved in all this somehow, right? So you know. He told me us what was happening. Or at least, he told us what he said was... god, I don't even know if it's true. He said he knew us in a past life, when we were dead, because he's the god of the Underworld or some shit."

"He's not *the* god of the Underworld. Not the ruler of it, I mean," Than said. "That's his father."

"Fuck, really?"

Than started to dodge Achilles' hooks, requiring him to look at where he was aiming. "Yeah. Hades. Anyway, he just dropped all of it on you? Did he... mention *how* he knew you back then?"

"He implied that Pat and him and I were all together, if that's what you mean." Achilles maybe hit Than a little too hard on that one, and had to shake out his hand after, his knuckles stinging. "And said he was the reason me and Pat got together last month."

"He was trying to ensure the two of you ended up in a romantic relationship, yes."

Achilles swung a little wildly, and might've actually hit Than in the face if he didn't duck. "Yeah, well, that wasn't his business. Just because he's a god and he thinks he knows me doesn't mean he has the right to mess with my life."

"He's not—Achilles." Than lowered his hands, and had to dodge again, rotating his torso so Achilles didn't catch his shoulder. "What you have to understand about Zagreus is that all his meddling is only because he thinks he's helping. Because he wants people he cares about to be happy."

"He doesn't care about *me*," Achilles argued, "he cares about a different version of me, who's *dead*."

Than didn't try to refute this.

"I have these dreams, you know?" he asked, and received a nod in reply. "I'm not myself in them. I feel completely different, that person isn't me, and if that's who he remembers—if that's who he cares about—he's not thinking of me."

"He's not... he knows you're different. And he cares anyway. But wouldn't you and Pat be together even if he didn't interfere?"

They wouldn't be together if Achilles hadn't played that stupid game. They wouldn't be together if Achilles hadn't been drunk and jealous that Pat was texting someone else instead of spending time with him. They wouldn't be together without... Than, actually.

"I think that was you," he said. He didn't necessarily feel as if a weight was being lifted from his shoulders, more like every vein in his body had been clogged with emotion and it was slowly starting to clear. "I was sort of jealous."

The stricken look on Than's face was unfortunately easy to interpret and it did not promote that relief to push any further through Achilles' mind.

"That was him, too, wasn't it. You're friends, right? He asked you to—*fuck*."

"He didn't—I wasn't trying to—ugh." He said something under his breath that sounded like a curse but wasn't something Achilles could parse. "He didn't orchestrate all of this like you're thinking. I started talking to Pat because I really do like him. I like him as he is, although I also knew him before. Zag... had some interference with it. But not like you think."

"What kind of interference?" Achilles' hands curled into fists, too tight, his shoulders rigid again. How involved was Than in all this? After all, hadn't Pat met him because someone caught Than kissing Zagreus?

"I don't know, nothing more than a normal mortal would do when their friend is interested in somebody," Than said, starting to sound irritated with Achilles. "He texted Pat, once or twice, from my phone."

God, that way of referring to them. *Mortals*. Any relief Achilles had felt was long gone.

"Great. Of course." He leapt out of the ring, shrugging back into his jacket even though he was already overheated. The evening air would cool him off soon enough.

"Achilles, if you're mad at me, fine. But don't blame Zagreus for this."

"Hard ask." Considering that it seemed to literally be all his fault.

Than sighed from behind him. "Dammit, Zag."

There was a sharp, snapping sound in the air, and when Achilles turned around, Than was gone.

No more time to deal with the mortals, then, he supposed.

## 6. Chapter 6

### Summary for the Chapter:

Pat and Zagreus share stories and then other things, Achilles gets a talking to, Pat finishes his project.

Pat brought Zagreus in through the side door of the dorm building. Thankfully, his room was two doors down from the side entrance, and there was nobody around to notice that Pat was bringing the local cryptid into his dorm room.

Ordinarily, Pat would have been beyond enthused for this. The creature he'd spent all year chasing, and it had just appeared on his doorstep? He should have been asking Zagreus questions by the dozens.

Instead, he leaned his back against the door as soon as it was shut and closed his eyes for a second.

When he opened them, Zagreus was giving him a pitying look. "I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to ruin things for the two of you," he said. "I know how much you care for him—or, well, maybe I don't. I—wait, what's that?"

He was pointing at the mason jar that sat on the dresser-slash-TV-stand. The one that glowed softly, as if a firefly was trapped in it, the only bright thing in the dark dorm room, aside from Zagreus himself. It quite clearly belonged to him.

"Achilles, he, well. Picked it up a while back," Pat said. When Achilles had given it to him, Pat had been overcome with affection. He'd wanted to swoop Achilles into his arms and kiss him.

He turned on the lamp that sat near the jar, making the light of the glowing leaf less obvious. Zagreus was still looking at it, something in his face overwhelmingly soft, his brows drawn up and together.



"Gods, I miss him," he sighed. The longing in his voice made it seem all the more real, that he might have been their lover in another life.

"I've got some questions for you," Pat said, stripping out of his jacket and dropping it over the arm of the futon. He sat down, and Zagreus took a moment of looking around awkwardly before sitting next to him. He placed himself with his back against the opposite arm, his knees drawn to his chest. It made his shorts slide down his thighs, revealing that they were not, like his feet and his calves, on fire.

"I have some for you as well. Perhaps we should trade off," he suggested.

Pat agreed, and allowed Zagreus to ask the first question. They started with the simple things, Zagreus asking, "*how old are you?*" and "*what do you study here?*" and "*how long have you known Achilles?*" and Pat asking, "*how do you get here?*" and "*why are your feet on fire?*" and "*who is Than?*" The answer to that one had been fun. Pat was gobsmacked to find he'd gone on a date with the god of death.

"How do *you* know Achilles?" Pat asked, eventually. "How did you know him, I mean."

Zagreus took a moment to think before answering. "I was... obstinate, as a youth. I still am. My father wanted to find something to do with me. He employed Achilles to train me, which he did, in the sword and in, well, all the weapons I know how to use. And other things." He bit at his thumbnail, and the tips of his ears went a little red.

"Other things?"

"You know, all of the things an older mentor teaches a younger man. How to function in society—although there's not much of a 'society' down there—and how to be a good companion, all of that." Despite the beginnings of a flush, he said that as if the idea of teaching someone to be a good *companion* was completely normal. Pat nodded slowly, although his confusion must have shown on his face, because Zagreus said, "what, do you not usually...?"

"I don't think things are done the same up here," he said, trying to be careful with it, trying not to say something like *that sounds completely ridiculous*. Also, trying to avoid the burning question of 'is this a sex thing'?

Zagreus looked a bit bewildered. "How in the world do you learn how to have sex, then?" So it was indeed a sex thing.

"Experimentation?"

"That seems like it wouldn't go very well."

"I mean, it doesn't always. My first time was—anyway. Never mind. It's your turn to ask a question," he added, shoving off any awkward explanations he may have otherwise let slip.

As it turned out, he had to pick said awkward explanations right back up when Zagreus prompted him with: "your first time was, what?"

"Nope." He turned to the side so he could kick Zagreus in the foot. "Ask something else."

Zagreus only shook his head. "Give me an answer, Pat," he cajoled, grinning far too wide for somebody who was seriously irritating him. "I'll tell you about mine if you tell me about yours."

Now, that was a hard bargain to ignore. Pat was immensely curious about how Achilles had been in that world, and while he would have been happy to know what he was like teaching Zagreus to fight or whatever else it was he'd tutored him in, there was something perversely enticing about learning exactly how Achilles had *educated* him in other matters.

He had to give in, didn't he?

"Fine," he said, "it was in high school, and it was with this girl I'd been seeing, and I truly had no idea what I was doing, and it was in my car. And as you can see, I don't fit in the backseat of a sedan very well." He groaned even just recounting it. He'd seen stars that night, but only because he hit his head on the dome light. "Overall sort of awful, and looking back on it,

I'm fairly sure she didn't even come. She broke up with me a week later, but that's alright, subsequent attempts went much better."

Zagreus was still grinning when Pat stopped. He had to prod him again, and this time he did it slowly enough to feel that Zagreus' feet were actually quite pleasantly warm, like putting his feet up on the old radiator at his mother's place, which had been painted over enough times that it wouldn't burn you.

"And this is why I think it would be easier if you had somebody with experience teach you," he said. He looped an arm around his knees as he continued to talk, hugging them to his chest. "Achilles was... gentle with me. He took his time. Honestly, the very first time wasn't all that exciting, it was very nearly over before it started. I was so wound up. Of course, I'd been attracted to him for years."

Strangely, despite Zagreus' godhood, it wasn't hard to imagine him going through the woes of a teenage crush. "How old were you when you met him?" Pat wondered.

"I was already grown," Zagreus said. "Older even than Achilles. But I've been in this sort of form for a while now. I imagine I appear to be the same age you are now." He did look approximately Pat's own twenty-one years.

"Didn't mean to derail you," Pat said.

Zagreus grinned. "You want to hear more, do you?" He did not need to answer this. Zagreus leaned his head against the back of the couch. It made the leaves on his head crackle, but they must have been similar to his feet, a flame that did not truly burn. "I recall being so anxious, so desperate to be *good* for him. He was my first of everything. My first kiss, even. He was ever so patient with my inexperience."

"I hope he didn't tackle you into a wall like he did with me," Pat said. On every occasion he and Achilles had kissed, Achilles had done so with fervor, enough to make Pat's head spin. He couldn't imagine him taking things slow, the way Zagreus described.

"Oh, no, that was me," Zagreus said. "I was a little overzealous. Climbed into his lap. Couldn't be slowed." He lowered his knees, allowing him to lean a little closer to Pat, a teasing smile on his lips. "But really, Pat, I'm surprised you don't want to hear about my first time with *you*."

"I... oh." A shiver ran through him, settling at the base of his spine.

Zagreus seemed to take notice. "If you don't want to know, or you want me to stop... flirting with you and such, just tell me," he said, placing the words carefully. "I know you and Achilles are... and I've made things rough between you. It was never my intention, I sort of underestimated how monogamous mortals are these days."

*Mortals* was a strange way of categorizing them, and Pat surmised that Zagreus must have been *Immortal* in that case. 'Monogamous these days' was also a remarkably odd way to put it. "Were we otherwise, before?"

"Yes. Before me, you'd both been with other people together."

It was something he'd never quite considered before, although he knew it existed, knew there were people out there who called themselves polyamorous. Pat always thought it would be terribly complicated. But Zagreus didn't seem to be saying things weren't complicated, just that they were... worth the complications.

"I do, ah, want to hear about your first time with me."

Zagreus grinned, all mischief. "Are you certain? It's quite dirty."

Pat raised an eyebrow at him. "Try me," he said, bluffing all the way.

Zagreus leaned closer, so he could speak in a near-whisper but Pat could still hear him. "Achilles had me first," he said. "See, the two of you didn't live together, then. He was in the House of Hades, with me, and you were in Elysium, three levels up. In order to get to you, I had to fight my way through all the shades in Tartarus, Asphodel, and a good deal of them in Elysium, too."

Pat didn't entirely understand what any of this mean, and at his clear confusion, Zagreus simplified. "It was a long journey, basically an enormous obstacle course of things that wanted to kill me. Tough trip to make when Achilles sent me off with a plug this big up my ass, so you could just slide it right out to fuck me." He held his fingers out to describe the shape of the toy.

"Oh," Pat said, feeling a little winded. "'Quite dirty', indeed."

"Indeed!" Zagreus gave him a gentle squeeze to his shoulder, then leaned back, as if he intended to do no more.

Pat rested his hand on Zagreus' knee, and Zagreus hesitated, frozen with one hand on the back of the couch and the other hanging in midair. "You don't have to," Pat said, without knowing where he was going with this. "You can touch me."

"Can I hug you?" he asked, wildly innocent compared to all his talk.

"Yes, you can."

Zagreus leaned in, wrapped his arms around Pat's middle, laid his head on his chest. The space where his laurel leaves pressed against Pat's T-shirt grew warm, the same radiating heat of his feet. He sighed, squeezing him tight for just a second before settling in more comfortably. He made a little hum, some humor in it, like a laugh gone quiet. "You still smell the same," he said. "You're softer, though. You haven't been built for battle, this time 'round. That's nice."

"I can't imagine being a soldier, honestly," Pat said. He let a hand rest on Zagreus' back, could feel well-defined muscle through his shirt, more even than Achilles' athletic figure. "I also can't imagine falling in love with a prince."

"Two princes," Zagreus corrected him. "Achilles was a prince, too."

"Ha! Now that, I can see."

Zagreus held him tighter again, distinctly a hug. "I've missed your laugh," he said. Then, his head lifted. "Oh. Damn. That probably sounds strange, I'm sorry."

Pat rested his hand on Zagreus' head, drawing him back to lay on his chest again. "It's fine. I like strange, most of the time," he said. "And this... it feels right. Feels like we've done this before, which, I suppose we have. You know about all these dreams..."

"Hypnos told me," Zagreus said. "Not that we were talking behind your back—well, ah, we sort of were. But he said you and Achilles both dreamed of our past. Remembered it."

Pat filed away the information about Hypnos, and noted that perhaps the guy's whole 'I am the god of all things naptime' line wasn't actually a joke and actually may have matched up quite well with the Wikipedia article on his name. "I was wondering how you knew. Strange to think that those were, well. Real."

"You know," Zagreus said, a smile in his voice, "Hypnos told me some of them were, and I quote, *extremely sexy*."

"Ugh. I regret smoking with him," Pat said, although he didn't entirely mean it. "But yes, some of them were, well, more explicit, and I'm left reconciling with the fact that I have what are apparently *literal memories* of like. Eating your ass." That had been a fun one. Pat hadn't actually ever done that to anybody, but apparently Zagreus liked it. Liked the way Pat's beard felt. Yeah.

Zagreus chuckled, a little too low and dark for a casual laugh at a funny story. It was also a sound Pat remembered from his dreams. The spicy ones. "You've done a lot of interesting things to me," he said. "We've been together for centuries. Or, well, we had. You know."

"You've certainly got me at a disadvantage here, given that you remember all this and I don't." *Centuries*. Zagreus had been fucking him for *centuries*, and if his current self truly hadn't changed much from his past self, he'd

guess he was still interested in the same things. "I'll bet you could drive me crazy."

Zagreus' hands moved from their innocuous place around his ribcage down to his hip instead, finding the hem of his t-shirt and toying with it. "Yes, well, I'm at my own disadvantage. See, I've spent the past twenty-some years just absolutely *longing* for you. I'd go to pieces with a kiss."

"Would you, now." Pat couldn't deny the sense of arousal beginning to build. Of course he was turned on, there was a gorgeous man sprawled across him, and his mind was being flooded with dream-memories of all the different ways in which he'd been with said gorgeous man. Coupled with Zagreus' teasing storytelling of his first times with him and Achilles, it was a wonder Pat hadn't moved faster.

The pain of Achilles running from him was still raw and fresh, but Zagreus in his arms was like a balm, a comfort he hadn't expected to appreciate as much as he did. Pat was never really one for rebound sex. But was it truly a rebound if it was with a man who'd been his lover all along?

Zagreus shifted, rolled onto his stomach. In true finals-week fashion, Pat was just in sweatpants, the fabric thin enough that he could feel Zagreus pressed against his thigh.

"I... I do want to kiss you," Pat said, his hands tracing Zagreus' back.

"Please, do."

Zagreus ran hotter than a regular person would have, in a way that made Pat feel automatically nervous, like he had a fever. He seemed perfectly alright, and of course this could be easily passed up as another of the idiosyncrasies that came from his being a literal god. His mouth was warm, too, and crushed against Pat's, turning the kiss from tender to seductive in seconds. Pat felt like he was going to melt into this man.

Zagreus melted against Pat, in turn, his hands squeezing at Pat's chest as his hips hitched up against Pat's again. His cock, even through his clothes, was

even hotter than the rest of him, and Pat clutched at him, holding him close so that he could press himself against that heat.

"Blood and darkness," Zagreus huffed, a curse Pat had once heard Than say (he'd assumed it was some emo shit but it was apparently some Underworld shit). "I forgot how big you are."

And that was curious, wasn't it.

"Am I... is it the same? Do I look the same?" He'd yet to encounter a mirror in any of his dreams about Zagreus.

"Mm." Zagreus rocked against him again. "There are some differences. You wear your hair differently. Your beard is shorter. You're not built like you've been fighting a war for ten years." That much, he'd expressed prior. He pressed another kiss to Pat's mouth. "You're just as handsome. These are new, though."

As he said this, he removed the glasses from Pat's face, so that he could press in and kiss him without having to worry that he would knock his face into them.

"I suppose they didn't have those in whatever ancient time my past self lived," Pat said.

"True! Now, um. Pat. Could we—do you mind if I undress?"

His manners started a laugh out of Pat. "You're so *polite* for a prince of hell," he said. "Yes. Please."

"There's nothing wrong with politeness," Zagreus said, muffled as he tugged his shirt off.

His chest was just as gorgeous as Pat remembered from his dreams, tapering into a slim waist that Pat could grasp with ease, rocking up against him again.

"Zagreus," Pat said, as Zagreus insistently helped him out of his own shirt. "This might sound silly, but... I don't want to do anything I haven't already



done with Achilles," he said. It wasn't like he'd never gone further, but somehow it felt like a betrayal of his relationship with Achilles to fuck Zagreus. God, he was going to tie this train of thoughts into a knot trying to rationalize it. "I just... that's what I need."

"Yeah, of course," Zagreus said, running his palms over Pat's now-bare chest. "Just tell me how much you want. I'll give you anything."

"Thank you, I... just your hand on me. On my cock."

"Yeah." Zagreus dismounted from his seat just long enough to strip, and allowed Pat to pull him close, about to touch him, but halting when he realized yet another aspect of Zagreus' strange appearance that he'd not noted in his dreams, probably because his past self had been accustomed to it.

"It... glows?"

"Oh! Yeah, like my feet. Guess you being into that hasn't changed," Zagreus said. He kissed Pat again, didn't draw back when he spoke, so that he breathed his next words into Pat's mouth. "Want me to move like I was before? Rub against you?"

"Yeah." He guided Zagreus onto his lap again, let him situate himself so that the almost-too-fiery heat of his cock slid over Pat's. "*Fuck*, that's good."

"Gods, yes. Let's just—get off with me like this?"

"Mm-hm." That *heat*, it felt so much more than Pat expected, warming him from his groin up through his belly and into his chest. Zagreus moved his hips in such a smooth rhythm Pat wanted to know what that burning cock would feel like inside him.

"Zagreus. Back then, did you ever... I've never had a dream to that effect, but did you ever top me?" he asked, his hands on Zagreus' ass as he moved just to feel the flex of his muscle.

Zagreus jolted against him, moving faster. "Sometimes. You occasionally liked to just lie back and let me take care of you."

"A real pillow prince, apparently." He'd never had sex like that before, but the idea appealed to him, especially with Zagreus, who was so sweet and eager to please.

Zagreus laughed, and somehow it was just as sweet as arousing. He kissed Pat, his fingers scruffing over Pat's beard, the hot slide of his mouth and his cock becoming quickly overwhelming.

"M close," Zagreus admitted, not letting up in his steady rocking. His thighs were insanely powerful, or else he was going to be sore after this. "Kiss my neck, I like that."

Pat did as told, and found that he liked it, too, liked the way Zagreus cried out, throaty and unashamed, as Pat nipped at him. Despite saying he was close he held on long enough that Pat could leave him several hickies, blooming like a string of roses up his neck. It was reckless and obvious and Zagreus was loud enough that their neighbors would hear and Pat was going to leave a *god* with love bites.

It wasn't as easy in its unspoken pleasure as sex with Achilles, but the way Zagreus moved was easy and informed by centuries of sex and that was enough to have Pat at the edge. Zagreus talked through it more, told Pat it felt good, asked him to bite down, told him: "you won't believe how pretty I look all marked up by you."

Pat groaned and dug his fingers into Zagreus' hips.

Zagreus wasn't as terrible a quick shot as Achilles but he still said, "oh, damn, that was a bit fast, huh?" afterward. He didn't pout over it, either, just laughed and got his hand around Pat's cock. "You look pretty, too, you know."

"Do I?"

"With my come all over you like that? Yeah."

"Fuck."

"C'mon, like that, love. I've got you."

And then Zagreus kissed him, kept kissing him until he came, and for the briefest moment, Pat felt alright.

— — —

"I'm sorry I have to go," Zagreus said later, cleaned up now and kissing him again and again just because Pat hadn't told him to stop. Pat wasn't *going* to tell him to stop. "I really can't stick around, though. I'm not long for the surface."

"It's alright," he said, even though he wished he could just keep Zagreus around until he forgot how much he missed Achilles already. But that was selfish and a bit unkind to Zagreus and himself. "Will I see you again?"

"Of course, if I have anything to say about it. I just... tell Achilles I'm sorry."

"I don't know whether I'll be able to tell Achilles much of anything, for some time."

— — —

He couldn't tell Achilles anything for some time.

Achilles must have come back to the dorm at some point, because most of his things were gone and there was a note on Pat's desk. He knew Pat's finals schedule, so he'd shown up right when Pat was in the middle of an exam, which was a dirty trick.

It read:

*Pat,*

*I need some more time to cool off because if I don't, I'm going to say something to you that I regret. I can't say I'm not mad at you but I can*

*probably say I won't be mad at you forever. But I'm gonna stay at my dad's and commute until break starts.*

— Achilles

It was some freshman-year drama. Some high-school drama. It was stupid, and Pat swept the note off his desk and into the trash immediately.

And then he pulled it back out and set it on his desk, face down so that he would know it was there but he wouldn't be able to read it over and over.

Because it was proof.

That Achilles wouldn't be gone forever, that he would come back. Someday.

The end of term came and went, and Pat left for break, and Achilles still was not back. He could only hope that in January, that would change.

— — —

Pat didn't go back to working on his documentary project until the first week of break came and went. It had technically been due before the break, but he'd submitted the first half and had received permission to send in the second before second semester began.

*"Yet another stakeout and we've seen next to nothing. I'm starting to think Pat is dragging me out here because his actual documentary is on tricking Achilles into building up a resistance to the cold."*

The footage was of Achilles speaking directly into the camera, a thick scarf wrapped around his neck and his hair spilling out from the hood of his jacket. He was grinning despite his accusations. From offscreen, Pat could hear himself say, *"Achilles, that would make a stupid documentary,"* and then Achilles rolled his eyes at the camera and disappeared.

The mic just barely caught Achilles', *"if you're going to make me do this then you're going to warm me up!"* but Pat distinctly remembered Achilles unzipping his jacket and smushing himself inside it with Pat, stuffing chilly

fingers up the back of Pat's sweater but kissing his neck and chest to keep Pat from complaining.

Achilles had barely spoken to him since the night Zagreus appeared. True to his note, he hadn't come back to the dorm room once, had taken the 40-minute drive between his dad's place and campus every day during finals. He'd texted Pat once to let Pat know he was okay, that he still needed time, that he'd see him in January. Promised he wouldn't secretly move out over break or anything. Said 'Merry Christmas' and 'Happy New Year' and absolutely nothing else.

It made editing hours of footage, which usually included Achilles, into a painful endeavor, especially when he reached the recordings from the end of the semester, after Achilles was his boyfriend. Was Achilles still his boyfriend? Without Zagreus around to distract him, Pat thought about this constantly.

He could move on to the very last bit he'd filmed, some far-away shots that Zagreus had allowed him to take before he vanished to wherever he came from, just to give him an interesting conclusion. Not close enough to reveal anything, but enough to be mysterious.

Instead, Pat watched Achilles. Watched him step back in front of the camera, dramatically pretend to spot the Blood Man, and laugh when Pat responded accordingly and then realize Achilles was pointing at thin air.

Pat cut out the clip. It didn't need to be left in.

— — —

"Alright, kid."

Achilles' dad dropped into the chair opposite the couch Achilles was laying on, getting a head start on his book list for next semester. Achilles barely lifted his head, just enough to give his father an absolutely baffled look over the top of his first reading assignment for World Literature.

"I've been trying to give you space with all this, wait until you sort it out yourself, let you solve your own problems because you're an adult, et cetera, et cetera. But something is clearly wrong, and I want to know if there's something I can do to help."

Achilles shut the book, tracing the edges of the sticker from the university bookstore on the cover, then running his fingers over each letter in the big red text that read \*RENTAL\*. "I don't know if it's something I can explain."

"Try me."

He sat up, even though it felt like something was weighing down his chest. "I started dating Pat," he said, clipping his words because if he let himself start talking unimpeded, he'd never stop.

His dad gave him space to do that. Unfortunately.

"I started dating Pat, and then I found out that..." How to avoid the divine madness of it all? "It's a bit complicated, but I found out that we were only together because somebody else manipulated things. And if they hadn't got in the way, we probably wouldn't be together, and he'd still be with that Than guy with the glasses. Probably."

Achilles sat up because he was starting to feel like he was at some kind of old-timey therapist's appointment, back when they used to make you lie on couches. Or maybe that was just in movies.

Dad was still sitting there like he'd been frozen in place, his coffee cup halfway to his mouth. He seemed to reboot, and finished taking a drink. "You and Pat, hm."

"Well, yes."

"I always sort of thought that would happen," he said.

"It didn't, really." It wouldn't have, if not for literal divine intervention.

"Fizzled out before it managed to get started then?"

Well, that certainly wasn't true. Making out and then sleeping together and then attempted shower sex and then actual sex sex and then turning every moment they were together (which was nearly every waking moment and absolutely every sleeping moment) into a date... "No. It got started. Definitely got started. Just. I don't like the fact that it wasn't really *me* who got it started."

Dad was giving him a strange look. "Achilles."

"Father," he replied, purposefully grandiose for the joke of it.

"You do know that setting people up on dates is a fairly common occurrence." He set the coffee on the table. If he was ignoring it in the face of Achilles' troubles, things must have been dire. "One of your mother's relatives set her and I up. It's not unusual."

"This wasn't like that. This was like... Alright, so this guy Pat was seeing. His name's Than. It's weird. He's weird." Weirder than Achilles could ever explain, really. "As it turns out, he has this friend who's not even really close with me or Pat, he just sort of used to know us and he's weirdly invested in getting us together, and so he did all of this stuff, and asked Than to screw up his date with Pat, and... it's all quite convoluted." Again, more so than Achilles could ever explain.

His dad cleared his throat. "Alright, I'm just going to come right out and say it. You're being a little ridiculous, Achilles."

"Dad!"

He held up a hand, telling Achilles to hold it a moment. "My point is, it doesn't truly matter how convoluted it is. What matters is how you feel about him. Do you *want* to be dating him?"

"Not at somebody else's behest."

"Achilles."

"Yes, I want to be dating him." Of course he did. Even these few weeks without Pat had been torturous, worse than the summer Pat spent at his mother's place when they were fifteen. Now, Achilles knew what he could have and was shattered over losing it.

"Then I'll ask you again: what does it matter, how you got together?"

Of course it mattered.

Maybe it just didn't matter in the way Achilles thought.

— — —

When Pat saw his phone light up, he wasn't expecting it to be Achilles.

*I've thought about things, his text read. I decided that I care more about you than how I ended up with you.*

Pat was overrun with joy, half-tempted to just say *yes, let's go back to how things were*, and not bring up anything that could possibly stand in the way.

Instead, he forced himself to say, *I need to tell you a few things about Zagreus, first.*

And then, of all the responses he could have gotten, he didn't expect:

*I'm listening.*



## 7. Chapter 7

### Summary for the Chapter:

Achilles comes home, the new semester starts, and the freshman down the hall sure is an interesting person.

### Notes for the Chapter:

oh my god it's THE END???????

Wild. I kind of can't believe how ridiculous this fic got, but it still pales in comparison to some WIPs sooooo. I hope everyone has enjoyed the shenanigans, the lads, and the patron god of disaster bi. Thank you to everyone who leaves me comments on this, you're all so wonderful and I forever appreciate your kind words! I mean it when I say this wouldn't have gotten finished without you <3

He knew coming back to the dorms after break was going to be awkward. He let Pat know ahead of time that he was on his way, and it was only halfway through his drive that he had the sickening worry of *what if Pat didn't want him after all that?*

Achilles did have the actual Blood Man's romantic advances to contend with, after all. Pat had told Achilles, in a series of lengthy texts, that he and Zagreus had fooled around a bit. Achilles had asked a minimum of questions, which in hindsight was a bad move, because he was undeniably curious. Especially about the things Zagreus had said about his romantic history with past-life versions of Achilles.

In truth, Achilles wasn't as upset by Pat and Zagreus together as he thought he would be. Particularly since Pat's very long text sequence ended with him saying that the whole time, they were thinking of (and talking about) Achilles. Maybe it wasn't that contentious.

Achilles actually found that more than a bit of a boost to the ego.

Pat was, unsurprisingly, at his desk when Achilles returned. The very anxious part of Achilles had been nearly expecting for their beds to have been separated and moved to opposite ends of the room, but it looked the same as always, albeit a bit neater with the start of term. Achilles felt bad for making Pat do all the tidying on his own.

Pat was organizing his schedule, color-coding all his classes. This was his usual habit the day before classes began. His head jerked up when Achilles walked in, and he gave him a smile that was half a question.

Achilles had a whole thing planned out, everything he wanted to say. He remembered none of it as he dropped his duffel bag and took the few paces to cross the room at speed, meeting Pat who was already standing and opening his arms. Achilles felt very much that he didn't deserve forgiveness like this, but he also couldn't bring himself to do anything but sink into that embrace, throwing his arms around Pat's shoulders and burying his face in his hair.

"I'm sorry," he said, and it felt weak and pale and did not at all encompass everything Achilles felt.

"You were scared," Pat said, which was not at all something Achilles had even considered. The truth of it sank into him slow.

"Yeah. I was." Of course he was. Gods and monsters and past lives and the concept of an Underworld was fun in theory but existentially terrifying. "Doesn't mean I should've run." He let out a shuddering breath and continued to hold Pat close. He didn't know if he could keep talking if he leaned back far enough to look Pat in the face. "Doesn't mean I should've stopped talking to you like that. I haven't treated you well, Pat. I wouldn't be surprised if you... if you didn't want to jump right back into things."

"Don't talk like that," Pat said, and kissed him, just the side of his head, because it was really all he could reach. "If I gave up on you every time you were an ass, we never would have become friends in the first place."

Achilles couldn't help his laugh, and he also couldn't help that it came out sounding a bit like a sob. Pat's hand gently passed over the center of his

back. "Yeah, but being a shit friend is probably better than being a shit boyfriend."

"You're not shit at either of those," Pat said, "you're just sometimes kind of an ass. And so am I. But I love you, so I don't mind when you're being an ass, so long as you endeavor to do it less. Achilles. Ow. Stop hugging me so tight."

He did, but then all the energy he put into hugging Pat so tight bubbled out in a victorious laugh. Pat *loved* him.

"This is the part where you quit laughing and tell me you love me, too."

Achilles didn't quit laughing, but he told Pat he loved him too. Rather, he tried. He got halfway through his declaration when Pat kissed him, firm and forceful and passionate, like he'd been saving up romance during their weeks apart. Oh, if only Achilles could have figured his shit out sooner, they could have been doing this for the entirety of the break, no classes and track practice and documentary projects to distract from the very important business of kissing Pat for hours and hours.

He only realized he'd left the door open when there was a careful clearing of a throat from the doorway, followed by, "I suppose this isn't the best time...?"

Achilles was flushed bright red as he turned, terrifyingly certain that this was going to be their R.A., and while they weren't exactly doing anything *wrong*, he'd rather not be caught up in any sort of conversation as to why he was making out with his roommate.

It was not their R.A.

It was Zagreus.

Achilles was shocked to see him in the daylight, and even more shocked to see him looking relatively normal, not a lick of fire on him, his black-and-red eye turned a plain brown. Pat was as stunned as Achilles, his mouth dropped open in shock.

"Oh my god, were you really just a bored engineering major all this time?" Achilles asked.

Zagreus stepped into the room and closed the door, thankfully. "No! I'm still a god and stuff. But I got my mum to teach me how to look like a mortal, apparently it's a thing the Olympians do all the time." He shifted in place. "Very weird, wearing shoes. I'm actually enrolled as a student."

"That's... unexpected," Pat said. Achilles felt privately glad that Pat also wasn't in the know on all this.

Zagreus had his arms folded behind his back, and he shrugged, looking uncharacteristically shy. "Yes, well. I was sort of hoping we might... start over. If it's a new life for the two of you, it ought to be a new one for me, as well. I'm sorry it took me so long to realize that."

Achilles looked between Zagreus and Pat, and then back again. Zagreus was still holding himself in that sheepish way. Pat was smiling.

"I think we can do that, yes, Achilles?" Pat said.

"I... sure?"

A sigh of relief blew out of Zagreus. "Oh, good. Well, if we truly are starting fresh, then. Hello, um. I'm Zag. I'm a freshman, and I live down the hall."

"We've met," said Pat, giving him a once-over that was purposefully obvious. So he wasn't going to pretend like they hadn't had sex, then. Probably a good idea. "This is my boyfriend, Achilles."

Achilles wondered if he'd ever get used to the fizzy feeling inside him when Pat introduced him as his boyfriend. It had him smiling as he shook Zagreus' hand.

"Hi, Achilles," Zagreus said, "it's good to meet you." He looked as if he meant that with his whole heart.

— — —

Three weeks into the new semester, Zagreus was mostly getting used to life as a student. And Achilles was mostly getting used to Zagreus.

"So, yeah, I dropped my computer science class, because as it turns out, despite it being a beginner-level class, they do expect you to know quite a bit about computers, which I think is silly," Zagreus said. "I mean, I'd never used a computer before starting here."

"We know," Pat said, not turning to look at him. Pat was in Research Mode, sitting at his desk, his laptop and his textbook both open. It wasn't filmmaking this year, it was Gender & Sexuality, and he was doing a great deal of research on polyamorous relationships, particularly in Ancient Greece and Rome. "Trying to show you how to do things on a computer is like trying to show my granddad." (They'd told people Zag was raised in an extremely sheltered religious group. It wasn't entirely off.)

"It's not my fault the Underworld is very technologically slow on the uptake," Zagreus said, burrowing closer to Achilles' side. They were on Achilles' bed so that they could occasionally bother Pat in his research.

"Thanatos has a phone," Pat reminded him.

Achilles was trying to do his best to read his first assignment for Brit Lit, but *god* this book was boring. Zagreus snuggling up to him was much more interesting. He was always a little cold without his laurels and his burning feet, and so he leeches their body heat, and he was also wrapped up in one of Pat's hoodies, which was four sizes too big for him. "At least Stella from the library is nice," Zagreus said.

"Stella from the library thinks you're cute," Pat corrected him. "It's the only reason she has any patience for you with your 'how do I open a new Word document' bullshit."

"Achilles is perfectly patient with me," Zagreus said.

"Well, Achilles also thinks you're cute."

"Hey!" Achilles prodded Pat in the side. "You weren't supposed to tell him."

Zagreus shot up. "Tell me?" He gave Achilles an eager look, leaning with his hands on Achilles' thigh.

"To be fair, I think he already knows," Pat said. He was talking about how ever since Zagreus had stopped doing his vanishing-into-a-pool-of-blood stunt last week, he'd been much perkier, and *much* more handsy, as if he'd received some kind of sign. Pat had asked him what had him in such a good mood, and Zagreus had said, *"I really don't think you want to know about Master Chaos, Pat."*

Pat did. Achilles didn't.

"I..." Achilles paused, flustered enough that it was a struggle to make it through a sentence. "It's just, well. I've gotten to know you pretty well the past few weeks." Understatement. Zagreus spent every every day with them (them and Than, that is, because Than wasn't Zag's roommate but he sure did seem to spend a lot of time in his dorm room). He'd even fallen asleep nestled between Achilles and Pat on the futon three nights ago and *wow that had been a fun case of morning wood*.

Zagreus nodded eagerly, letting him go on.

"And I've already told you that I misjudged you at first," he said. Zagreus was, above all things, desperately earnest and genuinely *good* in a way that Achilles didn't think a meddling deity would be. "But it's more than that, I. God. Why was this easier before?" he asked nobody in particular, blowing a loose strand of his hair out of his eyes.

"Because when it was me, you just did this," Pat said, shutting his textbook, flicking his glasses off, setting them on the desk and leaning across the short distance to pull Zagreus into a kiss.

Something felt strangled deep in Achilles' gut as he watched them. He knew this wasn't their first. He also felt, distantly, that he should have been jealous, but oh *fuck*, it was hot. Zagreus just completely *melted* for Pat, and Achilles felt like he was going to fall to pieces just watching.

When they parted, Zagreus wasted absolutely no time in turning and kissing Achilles, putting his arms around his shoulders and half-clambering into his lap. He smelled like Pat, or at least the hoodie did, and it was difficult to find Zagreus within all that fabric. Achilles slid his hands up under the hoodie and only found bare skin—Zagreus wasn't wearing a shirt beneath. He was little but he was *built*, like a Greek god. Obviously.

Zagreus slid a hand into Achilles' hair and his fist tightened, not pulling, but getting a good grip. "*Fuck*," Achilles breathed into his mouth. Zagreus knew what he liked before Achilles even told him, like he'd done all this before.

Because he *had* done all this before.

Achilles could play at that game. He searched his memories, recalling the dreams he found himself thinking of on the occasions on which Pat was not around and he touched himself. He seized Zagreus' waist, squeezing tight, and was rewarded with a moan that both satisfied him and spurred him on.

Zagreus rocked down into his lap. "Already?" Achilles teased, although he had literally no room to.

"Hush," Zagreus said, tapping his lower lip. "Kiss me again."

Achilles did, only pausing when he felt the bed dip because Pat joined them. Pat kissed Achilles' neck, only riling him up further, making him buck underneath the weight of Zagreus on his lap.

"Our beds are not big enough for this," Achilles grouched.

"Let me off, then," Zagreus said. "You two stay right there, okay?"

"Dare I ask what you're plotting?" Pat said. Achilles sort of wanted to know as well, fully aware he was not going to last. Patroclus had made good on his promise to edge Achilles until he cried, but as it turned out that didn't take much provocation.

“Gonna suck you off.” Zagreus wiggled out of the hoodie, and paused to get Achilles as naked as he could in five seconds. This resulted in Achilles wearing only his boxers and his socks, a combination that felt silly but was alright because Pat was close to matching him, although Pat actually got rid of his underwear completely, leaving him in only his socks. It was ridiculous, domestic, and Zagreus was grabbing Pat’s desk chair and turning it around, urging the two of them closer to the edge of the bed.

“Which one of us are you sucking off?” Patroclus asked.

“Both.”

“Both?” Achilles struggled to focus with Zagreus’ hand on his cock.

“Yeah. Hey, do you ever think about how this chair is the perfect height for this?”

Achilles’ bunk was propped up on cinderblock risers so that he could store half his wardrobe and whatever didn’t fit in the closet under the bed, which did indeed make the chair the ideal height for Zagreus to sit in as the two of them shifted closer.

“Please explain how you’re going to do both?” Achilles was still not over this.

“I’m good at multitasking,” Zagreus said, and proved this by continuing to stroke Achilles through his boxers while he went down on Pat.

“Oh, good, I’m first,” Pat said, with no small amount of smugness. “Now we’ll not have to worry about the fact that you fall asleep right after you come.”

It made Zagreus splutter, and when he drew off Achilles realized he was laughing. “That hasn’t changed, huh!”

“Be quiet,” Achilles huffed, and in a moment of confidence born of the fact that he was pretty goddamn sure Zagreus would get off on this, he grasped the back of his head and pulled him back onto Pat’s cock.



He was right. Zagreus' eyes rolled back and he moaned, and when Achilles tried to take his hand out of his hair, Zagreus slapped a hand over his, keeping him there. He wanted Achilles to make him take it at his pace.

It was difficult to keep up with, especially while Zagreus stroked Achilles, but he held him firm enough, urging him up and down Pat's cock. He wasn't certain whether the pace or Zag's tongue or just the concept of all this was getting Pat off but he was sure getting there, his head leaning against Achilles' shoulder and his every breath turning into a moan.

Zagreus pulled off before he got there, though, as soon as Achilles got so overwhelmed his grip on Zagreus' neck slackened. After a few heaving breaths he said, "gods, you taste good."

Instead of getting right back to what he'd been doing, as Achilles expected, Zagreus took his hand off Achilles' cock, grasping his hip instead. His opposite hand stroked Pat, a messier slide after his earlier attentions. He must have wanted to keep Pat from finishing in his mouth, Achilles assumed.

Certainly he did not expect Zag to swallow him down instead, swapping things up before Pat had even come.

Achilles gasped, cursed, very nearly fucked Zagreus' mouth but was stopped by Zag's hand on his hip.

"Oh fuck yes," Pat sighed. Rather than following Achilles' example and directing Zagreus, Pat pulled Achilles into a kiss, one which felt even wilder and dirtier than their first had been.

Zagreus' mouth was, in the simplest way Achilles could put it, *too fucking much*. This had to be supernatural, or maybe it was just the combination of Zagreus' mouth and Pat's everything—Pat didn't let up on kissing him and he grasped Achilles' hair, too, making a tight fist that kept Achilles right where he wanted him and oh god, Achilles wanted nothing more than to be right where Pat wanted him. Pat's opposite hand kneaded at Achilles' chest, driving him absolutely to the edge.

Zagreus tried to pull back and off, probably to switch back like he'd already once done, but there was literally nothing on heaven or earth that could stop Achilles from coming right then. This resulted in him spilling over Zagreus' lips and chin, a visual he got because Pat pulled off and back and muttered, "oh, fuck, *fuck*." in enough time to catch his attention.

They both watched Zagreus catch his breath, lick his lips, wipe up a spatter of Achilles' come on his chin and thumb it back into his mouth. "You went earlier than I thought you would. I wanted to swallow that."

"Shit, you're going to kill me," Achilles huffed, quite unable to take that image after the rollercoaster of an orgasm he'd just been on. His heart was still racing. He'd run marathons that had left him less exhilarated.

"S okay, Achilles, I get on well with Death." Zagreus patted his thigh and laughed when Achilles rolled his eyes. "Pat, do you want—?"

"Yes, please."

Achilles, deciding to get Pat back, dragged him in and kissed him instead. He didn't like his hair pulled like Achilles did, but he did like Achilles to touch his pecs, which was honestly no hardship because Achilles spent most of his life wanting to bury his face there.

If Zagreus looked good sucking cock, he looked even better doing it with one load already blown all over his face, his hair mussed from Achilles' hands. Eventually Achilles stopped kissing Pat just to watch, and because Pat was too overwhelmed to kiss back.

"I'm going to—" Pat began, and apparently Zag was insistent on swallowing this time, because he dropped his head down, sucking him to the base.

"Good boy," Pat said. Zag's eyes rolled back—wow, god, that got him, didn't it?

Achilles focused on Pat's face while he came, his mouth dropping open, hand clutching tight to Achilles' over his chest.

Zagreus leaned back, cleared his throat before talking. “Wow, I’ve missed that. Shit. You two—“

“Get up here,” Pat said, shifting backward on the bed and gathering Zagreus into his arms, kissing him and then *licking Achilles’ come off his face*, god, Achilles really was going to die.

If they were going to kill him, he was at least going down swinging. He shifted so that he could step up behind Zagreus, one knee on the bed, effectively trapping Zagreus between them. He cupped Zagreus’ cock through his joggers, making him moan into Pat’s mouth.

“Look at you. You were so good to us,” Achilles said, pressing kisses to his neck. “So good, love. Let us take care of you, okay?”

He hummed assent through another stifling kiss.

Achilles reached past his waistband. “Nothing underneath these? You’ve been plotting this, hm?”

Pat dropped his head, kissing beneath Zagreus’ jaw and sucking at his skin until he left a mark. It left Zagreus free to say, “not plotting, per se, but I did want to be prepared—ah, Pat—!” His breath was labored and his voice went gravely from having Pat’s cock in his throat.

“You knew how much we’d want you like this.” Achilles stroked him, his free hand grasping Zagreus’ hip. “Good boy, you’re so sweet for us. You took us both so well.”

“Love—!”

“You’re close?” Achilles asked, stroking him faster, his opposite hand reaching down to squeeze Zagreus’ balls, the touch making him cry out and arch his back.

“Yes, sir!”

“Oh?” Achilles was startled by the thrill that ran through him at Zagreus calling him ‘sir’.

“‘M so close!”

Pat finally leaned back, running his thumb over the place he'd kissed Zagreus. “Look how pretty you mark up,” he said. “Your whole class is going to see that Monday, hm?”

Zagreus honest-to-god giggled then, his hips rocking in Achilles' grasp, fucking into his fist. “Yeah. Yes. Want everyone to see.”

“You want them all to know what a little slut you are for us?”

“Pat!” Achilles said, scandalized.

”*Pat*,” Zagreus said, much less offended and more aroused.

Pat tugged his sweats down. “There. Let me see what Achilles is doing to you, yes?”

Zagreus didn't so much as say anything, rather, he mumbled a wordless string of noises and reached behind to cup the back of Achilles' head, drawing him closer. “Give me one too.”

“Hm?”

“Bite him,” Pat translated. “Leave a mark.”

It had been a long time since Achilles had swapped hickies with somebody, having gone through a phase of being convinced that was deeply immature and embarrassing. Pat, of course, didn't show the marks a bit and Achilles wouldn't give him the satisfaction of being the only one covered in love bites.

He only really left Zagreus with a single semicircle of teeth marks, because as soon as he bit down, Zagreus came, groaning loud enough that the neighbors on both sides probably heard him and spilling all over Pat's belly below him.

“Gods—fuck—*Achilles*.”

“That’s it, love,” Pat said, pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek.

Achilles crushed his face against Zagreus’ neck, just breathing him in, fire and smoke and sweetness. He let Zag’s oversensitive cock go, stroking his hips and his thighs instead.

“Missed this,” Zagreus said, and even though it had only happened in dreams, Achilles missed it too.

— — —

The three of them got cleaned up, which took an extensive process because, as Pat noted, “there is no way the three of us will fit in the shower without at least mild head trauma, and I’m not about to let Zagreus leave this room.”

Achilles was the last to shower because he was the least messy, and when he emerged, Zagreus was sitting on the futon with a book in one hand and his other resting on Pat’s shoulder, because Pat was lying with his head in Zagreus’ lap.

“And he says I fall asleep after,” Achilles scoffed, taking a seat on Zagreus’ opposite side, where they had left an approximately Achilles-sized space.

With his unruly hair flattened and wet, his mortal disguise firmly in place, and one of Pat’s t-shirts hanging loosely off his shoulders, Zagreus looked remarkably human. Remarkably lovely, too, especially with all those hickies standing out against his pale skin.

He laughed at Achilles’ retort, setting down his book and holding his hand out instead. Achilles took it. “Doing alright?” Zagreus asked him. “We’re moving pretty fast, all things considered.”

“I’m good,” Achilles said.

“I’m serious, if you need me to take a step back...”

“No, really, I’m good.” Achilles squeezed his hand. “I don’t really know... where we’re going from here. But I like where we’re at. And I like where

we've been."

"Good," Zagreus said, leaning his head on Achilles' shoulder. "I like where we're at, too."

His free hand stroked over Achilles' knuckles, a comforting touch that, as with many things with Zagreus, felt oddly familiar.

"You're getting my shirt wet with your hair," Achilles said.

"Deal with it," Zagreus replied sweetly.

**Author's Note:**

The Cousins that Pat and Achilles talk to in the hot tub are [Ada](#), the wonderful leader of the trojan horse (driver of the trojan horse? who's driving this horse.) and [Egg](#), originator of donut perversions.

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